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Edwin the Fair

—

Isaac Comnenus

Sir Henry Taylor

23478,6 (2)

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SIR HENRY TAYLOR.

VOL. II.

EDWIN THE FAIR.

ISAAC COMNENUS.

Anal.

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1878, June 27.
Library fund.

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By SIR HENRY TAYLOR.

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1877.

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EDWIN THE FAIR.

"PESSIMA ENIM RES EST ERRORUM APOTHEOSIS."
Novum Organum, i. 65.

To

SIR HENRY HOLLAND, BART., M.D., F.R.S.,

THIS DRAMA IS INSCRIBED,

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF IMPORTANT SERVICES

RENDERED MANY YEARS AGO

TO THE AUTHOR.

London, June, 1842.

PREFACE TO EDWIN THE FAIR.

MR. TURNER'S learned and elaborate work has done much to make the Anglo-Saxon times better known than they were formerly, and we have ceased to regard them as antecedent to the dawn of civilization amongst us, or as destitute of the spiritual and chivalric features by which in reality some of the subsequent centuries (though not those *immediately* subsequent) were less distinguished than they. Of the dark ages, in this country, the tenth century was hardly so dark as the fifteenth; and if the aspects of each could be distinctly traced, the civil wars of the Anglo-Saxons would probably excite a deeper interest than struggles such as those of the houses of York and Lancaster, in which there was no religious and hardly any political principle at stake. Indeed though the three centuries which preceded the Conquest were on the whole less enlightened than the three which followed it, yet the Anglo-Saxon times furnish examples of both the Hero and the Scholar which the Norman can hardly match; and perhaps the real distinction between the periods is, that amongst the Anglo-Saxons learning and ignorance and rudeness and refinement co-existed in stronger contrast.

But even when Anglo-Saxon history was less read and otherwise understood than it is now, some interest was always felt in the reign of Edwin the Fair. There was left

to us little more than the outline of a tragic story: in some parts, indeed, even less—for here and there the outline itself is broken and wavering; but the little that was known was romantic enough to have impressed itself upon the popular mind, and the tale of "Edwy and Elgiva" had been current in the nursery long before it came to be studied as an historical question.

Edwin's contemporaneous annalists, being Monks, were his natural enemies; and their enmity is sufficiently apparent in their writings. But notwithstanding all their efforts and all the influence which the monastic orders undoubtedly possessed over the English populace of the tenth century, there is reason to think that the interest taken in Edwin's story may have dated from his own times. His name having been supplanted by its diminutive "Edwy," seems to indicate a sentiment of tenderness and pity as popularly connected with him from the first; and his surname of "The All-Fair" (given him, says the Monk Ingulphus, "pro *nimiâ* pulchritudine"), may be construed as a farther indication that the success of the monastic faction in decrying him with the people was not so complete as the merely political events of his reign might lead us to suppose.

Whilst the details of his story are left, with one or two exceptions, to our imagination, the main course of the struggle in which he was engaged represents in strong and vivid colours the spirit of the times. It was a spirit which exercises human nature in its highest faculties and deepest feelings—the spirit of religious enthusiasm; a spirit which never fails to produce great men and to give an impulse to the mind of a nation; but one which commonly passes into a spirit of ecclesiastic discord, and which cannot then be cast out without tearing the body. In the tenth century it vented itself in a war of religious opinion.

The monastic orders—in this country at least—were then in the ascetic and fanatical stage of their existence; and the wisdom of this world at Rome, profiting by the enthusiasm

of these distant regions,—in which the Pope had more honour than in his own country,—was engaged in the endeavour to fasten the obligation of celibacy upon the Secular Clergy, thereby reducing the whole Church into a more compact and orderly subservience to its Head. The Regulars afforded their zealous co-operation: for they naturally grudged to their Secular brethren the liberty which they had denied to themselves; and for their own rule of life they had adopted, in its fullest rigour, the maxim of St. Augustine—"Malum est mulierem videre, pejus alloqui, pessimum tangere." This question of clerical celibacy, therefore, became one of the great sources of divisions in the Church.

The growing influence and uncompromising spirit of the monastic orders had been regarded by successive Kings, sometimes with favour, and sometimes with jealousy and fear; and according as one side or the other was uppermost, Seculars were ejected from their benefices and monasteries established; or Monks were ejected from the monasteries and Seculars restored. But upon the whole, the fanatical party had been gaining ground for more than a century; and in the reign immediately preceding that of Edwin, monasteries had been multiplied throughout the land.

From this state of things, danger arose to the country in more ways than one. First, there was the weakness from internal divisions; and next, there was the exhaustion of the King's revenues in the building and maintenance of monasteries instead of ships and military defences. The Danes saw their advantage, and after sixty years' remission of hostilities, they descended once more upon the British coast. A monastery was more easily stormed than a castle, and yielded a richer recompence; and the prayer of the Anglo-Saxon liturgy for deliverance "a furore Northmannorum" brought no help to those who had renounced the duty of helping themselves. Thus the Regulars had

hardly triumphed over the Seculars before the latter were revenged by the Danes.

I have taken the liberty of choosing from amongst the accounts of the reign given by its earliest historians, where they conflict, those which were most characteristic, whether or not they might have the best claim to be considered authentic. In the accounts of the earlier ages of a country, perhaps the truth of history is to be sought, less in the accuracy of the record, than in the nature and character of the events recorded and the manner of recording them ; and the generalizations from the facts of such histories may be just, whether the facts be truly stated or not, provided only they be such facts as might probably and naturally have occurred in such times. The first decade of Livy's History has been proved of late years to be for the most part fabulous ; but the fables are characteristic of the times, and the "Discorsi" of Machiavel, generalizing from them, have lost little or nothing of their value. To take an example from the subject of my drama, William of Malmesbury relates of Edwin, "Nam et Malmesburiense cœnobium, plusquam ducentis septuaginta annis a Monachis inhabitatum, clericorum *stabulum* fecit." Whether it be true or not, that the monastery at Malmesbury had been established for more than 270 years, and that Edwin ejected the Monks and put Secular Clergy in their place, we derive from the relation the knowledge that such was the sort of event by which that age was agitated, and we learn also the spirit in which such an occupation of a monastery was regarded by a Monk.

LONDON, *June*, 1842.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

OF THE SECULAR PARTY.

EDWIN THE FAIR, *King of England.*

EARL ATHULF, *Cousin to the King and Brother to Elgiva.*

EARL LEOLF, *Heretoch or Commander of the King's Armies.*

EARL SIDROC, *a Leader of the King's Party.*

CLARENBALD, *a Secular Priest and Lord Chancellor.*

WULFSTAN THE WISE, *Chaplain to Earl Leolf.*

ERNWAY, *a follower of Earl Leolf.*

GRIMBALD, *the King's Jester.*

RICOLA, *a Secular Priest, Chaplain to the King.*

OSBERN, *Bishop of Rochester.*

OSCAR, *a follower of Leolf.*

OF THE MONASTIC PARTY.

ODO SEVERUS, *Archbishop of Canterbury.*

DUNSTAN, *Abbot of Glastonbury.*

HARCATHER, *a Military Leader and Governor of Chester Castle.*

RUOLD, *Son of Harcather.*

BRIDFERTH, *Chaplain to Dunstan.*

SIGERIC, *Secretary to Odo.*

GURMO, *a creature of Dunstan.*

Ceolwulf, Æthelric, Eadbald, Ida, Brand, Ecfrid, Gorf, Tosty, etc., *Military Leaders.*

Leofwyn, Fridstan, Oswald, Ethelwald, Cumba, Godredud, Morcar, Monn, etc., *Ecclesiastics.*

WOMEN.

ELGIVA, *Cousin to Edwin the Fair and afterwards Queen.*
ETHILDA, *Sister to Edwin the Fair.*
GUNNILDA, *Queen Mother.*
EMMA, *Daughter to Wulfstan the Wise.*
HEIDA *and* THORBIORGA, } *Fortune-Tellers.*

TIME—ANNO DOMINI 956.

EDWIN THE FAIR.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A Forest.* *A* Swineherd *tending his swine.*

Swineherd (*sings*).

The hog he munched the acorns brown
Till joyfully twinkled his tail,
And he twitched himself up and he tossed himself down,
And he wriggled and reeled and galloped and squealed,
As though he were drunk with ale:
For you shall know that what by ale or wine
To man is done, that acorns do to swine.

Ah! it was so. Alack-a-day! so it was once.

Enter a Forester.

Forester. Grunt! grunt! No end to swine. Why, here's a herd!
Beech-mast is scarce. Routing and grunting. Ho!
Who's here?

Swineherd. A sinful unconsolable man,
The swineherd Ulf.

Forester. Why, swineherds are but men,
And man is sinful. Ulf, what grief is his?
This is a world of ever-growing griefs.

Swineherd. His grief, Sir, is a grief touching his swine,
Which swine have lost their appetites.

Forester. How so?

Swineherd. The how, Sir, is a tale that moves to pity,
And if you list to hearken, it was thus:
Last Tuesday week, the vigil of St. Swithin,
Up in the branches of an ancient tree,
I perched myself for shade, and there the wind
Rocking the bough and snoring in my ears,
It so mishappened that I slid asleep.
When I awoke my herd had wandered far,
And far had I to follow, till, God's love!
Belated in the dusky forest's verge
I found them much amazed, a furlong's length,
No more, from where the holy Dunstan dwells,
Scourging his wasted body half the night,
And wrestling with the Evil One.

Forester. Wish you well!
A tickle neighbourhood was that.

Swineherd. "Out swine!"
Quoth I, "ye villains, will ye run to the pit,
And I to follow!" And with might and speed
I drave them back; but volleying behind
There came such howls as scared us to the heart,
And to my humble thinking, since that hour

We have not had that stomach for our food,
That hearty hunger and that natural joy
In eating, that we wont to have.
Forester. Such howls!
What howls? The Devil's were they, or were they Dunstan's?
Swineherd. Sir, I have ears unskilful to discern
Betwixt the twain. They might have come from either;
For Dunstan his own back not less belabours
Than he belabours Satan.
Forester. Ay, 'tis true;
A holy man is he and gives his life
Simply to crucify the lusts o' the flesh
And mastery over evil spirits achieve.
But wist ye that *he* hurt the swine? Pooh! no.
Not he.
Swineherd. I know not.
Forester. Thou say'st well thou know'st not,
For thou know'st nothing; thou art an ignorant swineherd.
'Tis not thy swine alone; through all the land
Swine have the murrain, dogs are sick o' the mange,
Rot kills the sheep, and horses die o' the staggers;
With rust and mildew droops the earing corn,
Swarm orchards with the snail, gardens with grubs;
And shortly, man and beast and herb o' the field
Are stricken with a thousand plagues and blights
Straight from the hand of God.

Swineherd. Swine, didst thou say?
Swine have the murrain! Is it come to that?
Prithee, why so?

Forester. It is but our deserts.
To please the young, misguided, heedless King,
Our monks of Malmesbury, those righteous men
That ever were at work with book and bell
Praying and fasting, and with thong and scourge
Their flesh tormenting, have been rooted out,
And in their place vile Seculars are planted,
A hunting, dancing, and carousing horde,
With wenches that they call their wives forsooth!
Oh shame to clerks, that they should wive and bed
And lead their lives so beastly! Woe is me!
What but a curse could light upon the land
When holiest men that wont to serve the poor
With alms unceasing, beg their bread themselves,
And lewdest prosper! Softly—stand aside;
Here comes a nobleman, if we may guess
By his attendance. Canst thou yet discern
His cognisance? Earl Athulf, as I live!

Enter ATHULF.

Athulf. Save you, good friends! How far may't be to Kingston?

Forester. An hour, my Lord, or little more. 'Tis late,
Or you might take the road by Warlewood Chase:
'Tis some mile shorter.

Athulf. Being so, my friend,
The lateness should be called a reason more.
Forester. True, Sir; but it should lead you near the spot
Where Father Dunstan for these three weeks past
Nightly encounters Satan.
Athulf. For myself
I heed not that. Howbeit, that way wending,
Methinks that my attendance would wax thin.
Please you to show me by what devious path
I may eschew the Devil and Father Dunstan.
Forester. At your command, Sir. I will go before you.

SCENE II.—*A Corridor in the Palace at Kingston.*

ODO, HARCATHER, RUOLD.

Odo. Earl Athulf come! I'll with you to the King.
Harcather. You'll find your monasteries emptied out
Under your nose, my Lord, at Sheen and Sion
Ere it be long; and why you arm not now
It passes me to guess.
Odo. The Abbot, Sir,
The Abbot listens to no mortal voice
Except his mother's; and old Cynethryth
Is fearful of divisions; for in her youth
The splitting of the realm within itself

Was wont to sound a summons to the Dane.
And fetch him o'er the seas.

Harcather. An old wife's tale.

Odo. I'll bring you to the King, and testify
That what you charge on Athulf and his house
Is worthy of all credit.

Harcather. Ruold, mark,
I will thee not to loiter thus at court.
Get thee again to Chester, son. Farewell.

[*Exeunt* ODO *and* HARCATHER.

Ruold. Father, farewell! and then farewell the court!
To stay should but divide me from my friends
By worse than distance; for my father's hand
Is raised against them. Wherefore, fare you well,
Good Athulf and Elgiva. Peace be with you.

[*Exit.*

Enter LEOLF *and* ATHULF.

Leolf. Fair shines the hour and friendly to my spirit,
That brings thee back. Welcome once more to Kingston!
I would have said to court; but, by my faith!
Far liefer would I to a cottage bid thee,
Than such a court as this.

Athulf. Court, cot, or camp,
Hutch, hovel, let it be, or blasted heath,
In shine or storm, well met! What ails the court?

Leolf. Its old disorder, cynics say, made up
Of ills, tho' diverse, not dissociate:
Ambition's fever, envy's jaundiced eye,
Detraction that exulcerates, aguish fear,
Suspicion's wasting pale insomnolence,
With hatred's canker.
Athulf. To which add, no doubt,
Monks for physicians.
Leolf. There you touch a theme
For large and leisurely discourse. To-night
I will but say, the boldest of bold hearts
Is hither come in season.
Athulf. Say you so?
Come cowl and crosier! With a cap of steel
And battle-axe in hand, we will not fly.
But softly for a season! In what current
Runs the blood-royal? Are we where we were?
Leolf. O'er the Queen Mother's mean and meagre soul
Hath monkery triumphed; taking for allies
Her past misdeeds and ever-present fears.
Upon the Princess too I see it steal,
And stain her pleasant purity of spirit.
Athulf. But still the King is staunch?
Leolf. Young, young and warm;
Prompt in defiance, too precipitate;
For we must have him crowned ere it be safe
To cross them. But the passion which in youth
Drives fast downhill, means that the impulse gained

Should speed us up the hill that's opposite.
How found you the mid-counties?
Athulf. Oh! monk-ridden;
Raving of Dunstan.
Leolf. 'Tis a raving time:
Mad monks, mad peasants; Dunstan is not sane,
And madness that doth least declare itself
Endangers most and ever most infects
The unsound many. See where stands that man,
And where this people: then compute the peril
To one and all. When force and cunning meet
Upon the confine of one cloudy mind,
When ignorance and knowledge halve the mass,
When night and day stand at an equinox,
Then storms are rife. Yet once the King were crowned,
We could face Dunstan; which he knows too well,
And still by one thin pretext or another
Defers the coronation, and his will
The Primate follows.
Athulf. Upon Edwin's head
Before the crown must come the stout steel cap;
Is it not so?
Leolf. I see no other end;
And therefore, Athulf, in a happy hour
Com'st thou to Kingston. With our trustiest friends
We'll counsel take to-morrow. All is ripe.
You're strong in Wessex, and can thither send
To hold your strength in readiness. Meanwhile

Breathe not a word of menace; for at court
The monks have eyes to see and ears to hear,
Themselves nor seen nor heard.
Athulf. Monks and stone walls,
Since both of you have ears, I'll teach my tongue
To say, "God save the King!" so whisperingly
That only God shall hear.—A truce to Kings,
To monks, to madmen; Leolf, at my heart
There's something that sits closer. Guess you what?
Or must I speak? How thrive you with my sister?
Leolf. Indifferently. In sooth I hardly know.
We'll talk of that—but by your leave, hereafter.
Seek we the Chancellor now, and let your mind
Put off its soldierly habiliments,
And on its garb of policy, to meet
The wise old man.
Athulf. Off, idle hauberk, off!
Off, clattering sword! off, greave and gauntlet!—There!
Behold me politic. Old Clarenbald,
A serious politician comes to council.

SCENE III.—*Warlewood Chase. Evening.*

Dunstan (*alone*). Spirit of speculation, rest, oh rest,
And push not from her place the spirit of prayer!
God, thou'st given unto me a troubled being—
So move upon the face thereof, that light

May be, and be divided from the darkness!
Arm thou my soul that I may smite and chase
The Spirit of that darkness, whom not I
But Thou through me compellest.—Legions vast,
The mind's glad host for victory arrayed,
Has thou committed to my large command,
Weapons of light and glittering shafts of day,
And steeds that trample on the tumbling clouds.
But with them it hath pleased Thee to let mingle
Evil imaginations, corporal stings,
A swarm of Imps and Ethiops, dark doubts,
Suggestions of revolt.—Who is't that dares——

Enter GURMO.

Oh! is it thou? What saith my Lord Archbishop?

Gurmo. He will be there.

Dunstan. At Sheen to-morrow?

Gurmo. Yes.

Dunstan. And what my Lady the Queen Mother?

Gurmo. Here
To-night.

Dunstan. I wished not she should come so soon.
No matter—let her choose—to-night then be it.
Go, get thee to the hollow of yon tree,
And let none else approach.

Gurmo. I'll howl and screech
That any this way coming shall be scared
And think the howls are Satan's.

Dunstan. Get thee gone.

[*Exit* GURMO.

And if thou howlest otherwise than Satan,
It is not for the lack of Satan's sway
'Stablished within thee.

[*Strange howls are heard.*

Say then that they do—
Say that they do hear Satan's voice in his,
And prate of red-hot pincers and what not,
And are they then deceived? Thou loose lay-priest,
Thou secular lack-brain, No, I tell thee, No.
Do I not warfare wage in very deed
With Satan—yea, and conquer? and who's he
Saith falsehood is delivered in these howls,
If so it be that they impart to boors
Truths else to them ineffable? Where's Satan?
His presence, life, and kingdom? Not the air
Nor bowels of the earth nor central fires
His habitat exhibits; it is here,
Here in the heart of Man; and if from hence
I cast him with discomfiture, that truth
Is verily of the vulgar sense conceived,
By utterance symbolic, when they deem
That met in bodily oppugnancy
I tweak him by the snout; a fair belief
Wherein the fleshly and the palpable type
Doth of pure truth substantiate the essence.
Enough! Come down; the screech-owl from afar

Upbraids thy usurpation; cease, I say.

[GURMO *descends.*

Await me in the border of the forest
By Elstan's well.

[*Exit* GURMO.

A sturdy knave is yon!
He has transacted murder in his time,
Yet will he walk in darkness through the forest
Nothing discomforted nor scared. Who next?
Ha! the Queen Mother!

Enter the QUEEN MOTHER, *in a Peasant's garb.*

Give your Grace good even!
You are a faithful servant of the Church,
And humbler weeds than these would gladly wear,
And wilder solitudes, by night or day,
Would seek to serve her.

Queen Mother. Father, I am faint,
For a strange terror seized me by the way.
I pray you let me sit.

Dunstan. I say, forbear!
Thou'rt in a Presence that thou wot'st not of,
Wherein no mortal may presume to sit.
If stand thou can'st not, kneel.

[*She falls on her knees.*

Queen Mother. Oh, merciful Heaven!
Oh, sinner that I am!

Dunstan. Dismiss thy fears;

Thine errand is acceptable to him
Who rules the hour, and thou art safer here
Than in thy palace. Quake not, but be calm,
And tell me of the wretched King, thy son.
This black, incestuous, unnatural love
For his blood-relative—yea worse, a seed
That ever was at enmity with God—
His cousin of the house of Antichrist!
Is it as I surmised?

Queen Mother. Alas! lost boy!

Dunstan. Yea, lost for time and for eternity,
If he should wed her. But that shall not be.
Something more lofty than a boy's wild love
Governs the course of kingdoms. From beneath
This arching umbrage, step aside; look up;
The alphabet of Heaven is o'er thy head,
The starry literal multitude. To few,
And not in mercy, is it given to read
The mixed celestial cypher. Not in mercy,
Save as a penance merciful in issue,
Doth God bestow that mournfullest of gifts
Which pushes farther into future time
The bounds of human foresight. Yonder book
In mercy to the King and not to me
Unfolds its tragic page. Is written there
Something that must be, something more that may,
But yet may be prevented.

Queen Mother. On my knees,

I pray thee, holy Dunstan, read not there
Of ruin to my son.

Dunstan. What there is writ
Needs must I read; and if this wily wench
That, profiting by the softness and green sap
Of ignorant youth, doth round her finger twine
The sceptre like a sliver—

Queen Mother. Insolent jade!
Were it not, father, a good deed in Christ
To have her—in a manner . . . say . . . removed?
For truly, truly I may say, my Lord,
Yea and in sooth I witness it against her,
That with her witcheries and wanton looks
She hath inveigled and ensnared the King,
Bewitched past reason, that he flouts his mother,
Forgets his duty—woeful, woeful day!
Says "Silence," if I do but say "God bless him!"
And all by her procurement and behest!
Scandalous minion! Were it not, I say,
An excellent deed and righteous before God
To take her from his sight, that she should cease
To vex good men and holy with her wiles?

Dunstan. With thee the cry is ever "Kill and Kill."
I tell thee once again, my soul abhors
This vulture's appetite, not more foul in act
Than gross in apprehension. Look we round:
In Wessex Athulf more prevails than we;
Leolf in Sussex; which of us is first

In Hampshire, hard to say. I tell thee, no;
It must not be.

Queen Mother. Or but to mew her up . . .

Dunstan. Nay, that were worse; it were but to inflame
By opposition the boy's passionate will.
Be patient; meddle not with means; put trust
In Providence, whose ways how knowest thou?
Say that loose access to that girl were gained,
Despite thy watch and ward, by that loose boy—
What thence should follow is not for us to know;
Nought, peradventure, that should thrive with her.
In women's breasts the passions that are bred,
Which for a summer's season work their will,
As surely with the dangerous hour's approach
Rise like armed Helots raging, and are found
Of their worst enemies the best allies.
With—with a woman's passions, not against them,
He takes the field who wisely would pursue
Her ultimate overthrow.

Queen Mother. Most true, my Lord,
Most excellently true!

Dunstan. I bid thee not
By either mean to practise to that end;
I do but tell thee 'tis a patient part
To stand aside in faith, nor put thy hand
To work that is not thine.

Queen Mother. Oh, man of God!
Command me always.

Dunstan. Hist ! I hear a Spirit !
Another—and a third. They're trooping up.
Queen Mother. St. Magnus shield us !
Dunstan. Thou art safe; but go ;
The wood will soon be populous with Spirits.
The path thou camest retread. Who laughs i' the air ?

Ecce crucem, spargere lucem,
Spiritûm Trias, pandite vias !

The way is open. To St. Elstan's well
I will attend thee, and there Gurmo waits.

SCENE IV.—*A Chamber in the Palace.*

Enter ATHULF *and* ELGIVA.

Elgiva. This is the chamber where the Council sits :
I leave thee here : the very rushes bristle,
Disdaining to be trodden by female feet.
Athulf. To meet at eight, the summons said. By this
They are at hand ; but ere you go, one word.
I see a trouble sit on Leolf's brow.
Elgiva ! Dear, dear sister ! art thou true ?
Elgiva. Indeed I am.
Athulf. And doth he know thee true ?
Elgiva. I trust he knows the truth.
Athulf. The truth, Elgiva ?
These are short answers. Dost thou love him still ?
Elgiva. Sincerely and in truth and honesty

Have I dealt with him always and do now.
I verily believed I loved him once.
I think I love him still.

Athulf. You think you do!
Who thinks she loves I think can love but little.
Beware, my sister, that ambition's weeds
Choke not the garden where thy love should grow.
In Man of questionable quality
Ambition hath been holden; but in Woman—
Oh! 'tis the veriest beggary of the heart
That winter ever witnessed!

Elgiva. Athulf, no;
A weaker to a stronger love may yield;
But not in me will love or weak or strong
Yield to ambition ever.

Athulf. Oh, this head!
So shapely and by nature so adorned!
Far rather would I see the glossy braid
Of its own golden tresses circle it
Than England's jewelled crown.

[*An* Attendant, *who appears at the door, announces* "The Chancellor."

Good-night, Elgiva. Said'st thou a stronger love?
The strength of love is constancy. Farewell!
As came the honey from the lion's carcase,
So sweetness comes of strength. Beware, I say;
Kings love like other men—or other boys:
Not so they marry. [*Exit* ELGIVA.

Gone in anger! Well;
Reproof that vexed not never yet sank deep,
Nor ever of a warning that was welcome
Came needful caution. Tush! a woman's wrath.
And yet the very day that first we meet
To send her from me angry! Tush! to-morrow—
Had she but said, Good-night!

[*Enter* CLARENBALD.]

Clarenbald. My Lord, well met!
If I be late, let them that are to come
Plead for me.

Athulf. Nay, you do but prove it true
That ever are the busiest the most punctual.

Clarenbald. Sir, they have leisure. Only frugal men
Are truly liberal, and for like cause
Will he that husbands time have time to spare.

Enter the KING, *with* EARLS LEOLF, SIDROC, ALWINE, *the* BISHOP OF ROCHESTER, *and two or three other Lords of the Council.*

Edwin. My Lords, we meet you here to be advised
Touching our coronation. My Lord Chancellor
Will set this thing before you.

Clarenbald. My good Lords,
What, if I err not, each of us with each
Hath weighed in several conference, the King's Grace
Commands me that I finally propound

For your collective sanction. From the West
Come tidings that the monks of Glastonbury
(Doubtless apt implements of their Abbot they!)
Have practised with Prince Edgar in such sort
As hardly may decline the name of treason.
Whilst they this child's simplicity seduce,
Their brethren in the ignorant multitude
Work a persuasion that the King not crowned
Lacks half the warrant of his sovereignty,
Which till the Pope through them shall please bestow,
The kingdom is disposable. This creed
Spreads day by day, and till the King be crowned
Will daily breed new dangers. From the hands
Of my Lord Primate, neither crown nor chrism
By any instance can the King obtain:
Wherefore, my Lords, our counsel to his Grace
Methinks should be, that scattering like the sun
All clouds of hindrance and delay, at once
He should rise crowned, and on a summer's morn
Shine in the feeble faces of the monks
A consummated Monarch.

Edwin. And his aid
Will this true servant of the Church and State
Afford us; [*turning to the Bishop of Rochester*] from whose
pure and holy hands
Much rather than from that disloyal Odo's
Would we receive the crown.

Bishop of Rochester. Most royal Sir,

Much honoured were the See of Rochester,
More honoured still were these unworthy hands,
Should they perform the office.
Edwin. Sirs, your votes.
You, my Lord Heretoch, speak first.
Leolf. The time
Forces conclusions, and Necessity
Sits in the seat of Counsel. Dunstan gains
By every hour's delay. Should my will rule,
The sun that sets upon St. Austin's Eve
Shall see your Highness crowned.
Athulf. All hail that eve!
Dunstan would rather Beelzebub were crowned.
Sidroc. And Odo when he washed the Devil's feet
(Shame to him for his pains!) felt not his nose
So sorely troubled as his ears will be
To hear of this. Enough—St. Austin's Eve
We're all agreed on.
The Rest. All.
Leolf. Then must all join
Their speediest with their wariest endeavour
To bring up forces.
Clarenbald. To this end, my Lords,
His Highness will provide you means to meet
In cover of the chase your chiefest friends,
And Wednesday he appoints a day of sport
For hunting of the boar. He then with us
Will lose himself, bewildered in the wood,

And others that shall likewise lose themselves
Shall find him, and in sylvan convocation
Shall all consult together and concert
The parts that each shall play.

Edwin. Agreed.

The Rest. Agreed.

Edwin. Then for this present, trusted friends, we part.

SCENE V.—*Another Chamber in the Palace.*

ELGIVA *and* ETHILDA.

Elgiva. How is it I find favour in the sight
Of the Queen Mother, and so suddenly?
When I was last at court no word she spake
Of welcome by herself, the King, or you.
Whence is the change?

Ethilda. I know not; but I know
That but one change in you would work in us
All love that you could wish. O sweet Elgiva,
Restore yourself to God in His true Church,
And stray not in that howling wilderness
Where never is the voice of gladness heard,
Of bridegroom nor of bride.

Elgiva. But how is this?
'Tis you, not I, that in that desert stray.
Except amongst the monks, I know not where
The voice is silenced of the bride and groom.
I pray you be not factious for the monks.

The King and they are now as far apart
As heaven and earth; did charity not forbid
I should seek further down for opposites.
Ask Athulf—ask my brother. Have you seen him?
He came but yesterday.

Ethilda. I saw him not.

Elgiva. Oh! he is bright and jocund as the morn,
And where is there on earth that wilderness
Which he could not reclaim? No sandy waste
Pressed by his foot, but what would teem with springs
Of fruitfulness and joy.

Ethilda. When last we met
I was almost a child; but I remember
How wild he was with pleasantness and mirth.
I was gay then, although I seemed not so
Beside his bounding spirit. Is he now
Of the same temper?

Elgiva. Not so thoughtless now,
And more in broken lights; but Nature's flag
Is flying still, whose revels in his heart
Hardly can care suspend.

Enter EDWIN.

Edwin. Oh, this is kind!
You know not, my fair cousin, what a cloud
Came over all the court when you were gone;
No city churchyard could be more forlorn.
Now we shall smile again.

Enter an Usher.

Usher. The Queen, so please you,
Prepares for her devotions, and bade say
She waits the Princess. [*Exit.*

Ethilda. For this night, adieu.
[*Exit.*

Elgiva. Adieu, good night, sweet kind Ethilda!

Edwin. Yes;
Kind is she always; she is kind to stay
Ever, when you are absent, by my side,
And also kind to go when you are here.

Elgiva. Your Highness. . . . .

Edwin. Cousin! Are we not alone?
Oh, how I hate my title in your mouth,
Whence every other utterance is a charm.
Rather than speak as in the audience-chamber,
Let us be children once again, to rove
O'er hill, through vale, with interlacing arms,
And thrid the thickets where wild roses grow
Entangled with each other like ourselves.
Can you and will you those sweet days remember,
And strive to bring them back?

Elgiva. Those days—O Edwin!
Can I remember? when can I forget them?
When flowers forget to blow and birds to sing
And clouds to kindle in the May-day dawn
And every spring-tide sight and sound shall cease

Or cease for me, then too for me shall cease
The sweet remembrance of the tender joys,
The smiles, the tears of those delightful days.

Edwin. And can they not repeat themselves? Again
Let us, though grown, be children in our hearts;
Then with the freedom and the innocence
Which led our childish steps we'll wander on
Through after-life, but with a fuller joy.
Let recollections of the past, if sweet,
Plead sweetly for the present.

Elgiva. Edwin, Edwin!
You are a King.

Edwin. Now, see! I wakened up
By art of incantation from its bed
A Spirit beautiful as break of day,
The Spirit of the Past, and bade it speak,
And prophesy and plead—and what response
Is this it meets? None but the words of form
The herald spoke, when o'er my father's grave
He brake his wand of office. Yes, a King;
But may not Kings be happy? Nor not love?

Elgiva. Oh, they are most unfortunate in that!
For when their hearts would rise from earth to heaven,
Leaving low aims, which can but be through love,
Then strangers intermeddle with their joy.
And strangers such as those that circle you
Are opposites to joy and love not more
Than they are to all monarchy malignant.

The monks are enemies that Kings may fear,
Though of the bravest, and my father's house
Is hateful in their sight.
Edwin. Nay, talk not of them!
I loathe this monkery, and if I live
Will root it from my realm.
Elgiva. Oh that you may!
And earls not few and many a gallant thane
Would gladly in that cause their hearts' best blood
Pour out like water. Athulf is but one,
Yet if you knew him is he many's worth.
Edwin. If more of him I know not, yet that much
I amply know. Then surely with his aid
We may defy the monks, or better still
We may forget them; ay, forget the world,
Its cares, its kingdoms, and unbank the hours
To that soft overflow which bids the heart
Yield increase of delight. Beloved Elgiva,
Your beauty o'er the earth a passion breathes
Which softly sweeping through me, brings one tone
From all this plural being, as the wind
From yonder sycamore, whose thousand leaves
With lavish play to one soft music moved
Tremble and sigh together.
Elgiva. What a charm
The neighbouring grove to this lone chamber lends!
I've loved it from my childhood. How long since
Is it that, in the compassed window met,

The blackbird sang us forth; from yonder bough
That hides the arbour, loud and full at first
Warbling his invitations, then with pause
And fraction fitfully as evening fell,
The while the rooks, a spotty multitude,
Far distant crept across the amber sky.
But hark! what strain is this? No blackbird's song,
Nor sighing of the sycamore!

Edwin. Some friend,
As if the key-note of our hearts divining,
Accordant music ministers. Hist! Hist!

(*A Song from without.*)

God speed thee, false day,
With thy gauds and thy splendour;
Thy glare frights away
All that's truthful and tender:

Give place then above
To the star that of old
Lit the glances of Love
When his secret was told.

Elgiva. It dies away.

Edwin. It is but distant more.

(*Song resumed.*)

On the bosom of night
Lie the tresses of truth,
But its moments take flight
With the light steps of youth.

Make the most of the least,
For too soon comes the warning,
When announced in the east
Is the grey-headed morning.

Edwin. Come, follow it; but stop—let me leap down
And help you from the window-sill. So quick!
If you are light of foot as Atalanta
You ought like her to give your Love the start.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter the QUEEN MOTHER *and* DUNSTAN *from opposite sides.*

Queen Mother. So, well—so, well. It may be so, my Lord;
But mercy on my soul! if she should prosper!

Dunstan. To bed, to bed; 'tis late.

Queen Mother. But if she should!

Dunstan. The sky is clear; the air is still; the blue
Of yonder firmament is pure and soft.
God rules the night. Saw'st thou the falling star?

SCENE VI.—*A Court in front of the Palace.*

Enter the Chief Huntsman, *followed by other* Huntsmen, *a* Bugleman, *and Hounds.*

Chief Huntsman. What! none astir? Soho! the King lies long:
Young blood, Sirs—ay, it tingles when it wakes,

And yet it sleeps the soundest. Ranger! Churl!
What! down, Sir, down! Oh, flatteries of dogs;
We're courtiers all. Come, Uthric, where's thy horn?
We'll sound them a reveillée.

Bugleman. By the mass!
I wheeze to-day as who cries, "Bellows to mend!"
I'm out of breath with snoring. But no matter;
Here is a puff on't left.

[*Winds his horn.*

Chief Huntsman. Why, so! that's well.

Bugleman. Another whiff, then.

Second Huntsman. Wake not the moon, I pray;
'Tis but a half-hour gone since she turned pale
And went to bed.

Third Huntsman. This dog is full of fleas.

Second Huntsman. Excuse him; he has been amongst the monks.

[*Horn winds.*

Chief Huntsman. Who's here? Earl Sidroc. You are first, my Lord.

Enter EARL SIDROC.

Sidroc. I'm risen this hour; a snuff of the dawn for me!
My nose doth love it better than a nosegay.

Chief Huntsman. Right, my good Lord. You see her there, Sir—Elf;

Oh, the best bitch! She holds them all together;
Relay or vauntlay 'tis the same to her;
Endways she runs it still and orderly.

Sidroc. She is a good one. Sound another call.
To make the King's dogs wait is less than loyal.

Bugleman. Most true, my Lord!—I am not what I was!
Plague of this asthma! Better have the mange!

[*Winds a recheat.*

Enter ATHULF, *followed by a* Page.

Athulf. Set forward with the dogs—'tis the King's will.

[*Exeunt* Chief Huntsman *and his train.*

And hark ye, we shall hunt to-morrow too;
Here—boy! Tell whom it may concern, to-morrow
The King gives leave that I should ride Greymalkin.
I'll wear my hunting suit of green and gold.
See that Greymalkin is brought here betimes,
For we start early.—Grace be with your thoughts,
And peace with grace and joy be with your heart,
Sidroc the sober!—Go thy way, my boy.

[*Exit* Page.

Have you a moral ready? Come, a moral.

Sidroc. For what? Greymalkin, or the green and gold?

Athulf. Neither—they serve—they come but second now—

Appliance—means.

Sidroc. No more—why, that is well.

Athulf. Am I a coxcomb?

Sidroc. Who can answer that?

You were not yesterday; but lo! at court
If but a man shall stoop his head a minute,
Leaps a bespangled monkey on his back
And grins at all beholders.

Athulf. Oh, my soul!

Be not coxcombical, I beg of thee!
For I am lifted in mine own conceit,
That is too certain.

Sidroc. I lament your rise.

But come—discourse it orderly; by what beck
Of Fortune's crookedest finger were you led
Up this ridiculous ascent? The King?
Some special favour?

Athulf. Pooh! The King is kind,

But that is nothing.

Sidroc. Nothing good, I grant you.

The sun that striking in upon your hearth
Puts out your fire, may yet too weakly shine
Itself to yield you warmth: true, you say well,
The King is nothing. What less chilling light
Has beamed upon your fancy?

Athulf. By my soul

I know not that I shall not be ashamed
To tell my story. As I went to court

Late yesterday, the Queen, who saw me, sent
Commanding my attendance. A long hour
I waited, conning in the Troy-Town chamber
The stories in the tapestry, when appeared
The Princess, with that merry child Prince Guy.
He loves me well, and made her stop and sit,
And sate upon her knee, and it so chanced
That in his various chatter he denied
That I could hold his hand within mine own
So closely as to hide it; this was tried,
And proved against him; he insisted then
I could not by his royal sister's hand
Do likewise; starting at the random word
And dumb with trepidation, there I stood
Some seconds as bewitched; then I looked up
And in her face beheld an orient flush
Of half-bewildered pleasure; from which trance
She with an instant ease resumed herself,
And frankly with a pleasant laugh held out
Her arrowy hand.

Sidroc. What could she less? a hand
To have and hold is something; but to hold
And not to have—but end your tale—this hand——

Athulf. I thought it trembled as it lay in mine,
But yet her looks were clear, direct, and free,
And said that she felt nothing.

Sidroc. What felt you?

Athulf. A sort of swarming, curling, tremulous tumbling,
As though there were an ant-hill in my bosom.
—I said I was ashamed.—Sidroc, you smile;
If at my folly, well! but if you smile
Suspicious of a taint upon my heart,
You miss your mark, nor ever missed it more,
Nor ever loved.

Sidroc. No, no, I did not smile.
Proceed, I pray you,—speak it; of this hand
The issue in experiment? the proof?
This lesser quantity—this *in majore*—
Was it containable?

Athulf. I proved it not.
More manly, wise, and courteous I deemed it
Not to press hard an opportunity
Or wring it dry, but something leave behind
In warrant that no greedy grasping heart
Was mine, that on a trivial sign vouchsafed
Feeding might grow in self-encouragement
Too fast to fatness.

Sidroc. I conceive your counsel:
Not all devouring was your policy;
Something you left for bait.

Athulf. 'Twas not in craft.

Sidroc. Your pardon; in myself it would have been;
But let me not misjudge you by myself;
For by a happy instinct are you led

Unerringly and unsuspiciously,
When timid craft, too wary to be wise,
Would swerve for lack of blinkers.

Athulf. Here's the King.

Sidroc. And not he only!—Room, I say, make room.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter EDWIN *and* ELGIVA, *attired for the chase.*

Elgiva. Remember that a King can take no step
That is not measured by the rule and square
Of some too curious eye that follows him.

Edwin. We will be careful. Shall I tell you, love;
The grim Archbishop came to me last night,
And with him Dunstan; and, oh Heaven and Earth!
They preached me dead!

Elgiva. What was it that they preached?

Edwin. What preached? A thousand things! They said my crown
Was not a myrtle-wreath, and Kings were called,
As fathers of their lieges, to affect
All equally and favour none, nor loves
Nor friendships ever to permit themselves
Save as commended to their royal hearts
By counsels grounded in State policy.

Elgiva. Oh, insolence of churchmen! What a gift
Of meddling is in monks? What answer made you?

Edwin. I said, "Lord Abbot, and my Lord Archbishop,
My crown, of myrtle whether it may be,
Or as your hearts would have it, Sirs, of thorns,
I wear not at your will, and with God's help
I trust that I shall friendship find and love,
Counsel and policy more kind and sage
Than yours, my Lord Archbishop, or than yours,
Lord Abbot Dunstan."

Elgiva. I am glad you spake!
So frankly and so nobly—glad at heart!

Edwin. Lo! who comes here? 'Tis Dunstan, by my life!

Elgiva. And who is he behind?

Edwin. Gurmo by name.
'Tis a blue, swollen, unwholesome-looking knave
That ever follows him as plague does famine.

Elgiva. Let's seem to see them not and wend our way.

[*Exeunt* EDWIN *and* ELGIVA.

Enter DUNSTAN *and* GURMO.

Dunstan. Lo there! a lovely couple hand in hand,
But which of them is male . . . Seek out Harcather—
Tell him the public letters I have writ
Directing the disbandment of his force
Import not present payment. It were well

He muster them from time to time to take
The guerdon promised, which, if I shall send
The moneys, he may liquidate; if not,
The fault is mine, and having not the means,
He needs must put them off, but ever, mark,
To some not distant day. Take horse to-night.

SCENE VII.—*A Forest.*

The KING, ATHULF *and* LEOLF, *the* CHANCELLOR CLARENBALD, *the* BISHOP OF ROCHESTER, *and divers* Earls *and* Thanes.

Clarenbald. To this then cleaving, let us bind ourselves
By oath: so having in our hearts the will,
There shall the conscience clench it. My Lord Bishop
The oath administers.
Leolf. This tree supplies
The sacred symbol.

[*Breaks two twigs from a tree, and transfixes them crosswise with the point of his sword, which he then presents to the* Bishop.

The Bishop of Rochester (*holding forth the cross to the surrounding* Nobles, *who kneel and bow their heads towards it*). On Austin's Eve to crown your rightful King

Ye swear! If peril of your lands or life
Should stand between, ye swear of life and land
To take no count; but putting trust in Him
From Whom the rights of Kings are derivate,
In its own blood to trample treason out,
And loyalty in liberty to raise.
This on this cross ye swear!

All. We swear! We swear!

Edwin. And now, my lieges, lords and friends, adieu!
In very deed I thank you from my soul;
For in your looks I read that not alone
A common purpose joins you hand in hand,
But likewise that confederate hearts are here.
I thank you, Sirs; adieu!

Clarenbald. Disperse yourselves
In twos and threes; so severally seen
You will not prompt suspicion.

[*Exeunt all but* ATHULF *and* LEOLF.

Leolf. Athulf, stay.
I am for Sussex, there to raise my power.

Athulf. Your Seneschal is there; what needs yourself?

Leolf. Nor you nor I can longer blind ourselves.
I am needed nowhere.

Athulf. Leolf, on my soul
What I do see I see with grief and shame.

Leolf. Reproach her not; she's but a child in years,
And though in wit a woman, yet her heart,
Untempered by the discipline of pain,

Is fancy-led. One half the fault was mine.
A child is she; and look—upon my head
Already peepeth out the willowy grey.
My youth is wearing from me.
Athulf. Nay, not so.
Leolf. And youth and sovereignty, with furtherance fair
Of a seductive beauty in the boy,
What could they but prevail!
Athulf. A child? No, no;
And if she were, is childhood then so false?
She is weak of heart.
Leolf. No more. For Hastings I!
No more—or, Athulf, but one word—but one—
To her I would not say it, but to thee
My friend in all fidelity approved—
I—Athulf, she is gone from me for ever! . . .
But this remains . . . I can devote my life
To serve her and protect her . . . broken hearts
Have service in them still—Oh, more than strength
Is in the sad idolatry that haunts
The ruinous fane where lies a buried hope.
I can adore her, serve her, shield her, die. . . .
I pray you pardon me . . . is shame no more?
I should be silent; license have I none
To either dotage—that of youth or age.
Athulf. Oh, Leolf! oh, my friend!
Leolf. Quit we the theme.

But from my griefs and me this counsel take;
Expend the passion of your heart in youth;
Fight your love-battles whilst your heart is strong,
And wounds heal kindlily. An April frost
Is sharp, but kills not; sad October's storm
Strikes when the juices and the vital sap
Are ebbing from the leaf. No more. My men
Shall stand in readiness; but for myself,
Unless a martial opposition call,
I would the King might please to pardon me
If I appear not on St. Austin's Eve.

Athulf. I'll say that you are shaken in your health:
This shall suffice—I would it were less true.

Leolf. You'll hear, and that ere long, my native air
Has done its work restorative. Farewell.

SCENE VIII.—*In the Palace.*

The KING *and* CLARENBALD.

Clarenbald. How base to be so foolish! and again,
How blind to be so base! By Jacob's staff,
It made me young to see them; my old blood
Sprang to my wrinkles, where it had not been
These fifty years. One said that he was sick;
Another's wife was dead; a third would go,
But he must have a warrant signed and sealed.

"Good carpet-knights!" quoth I, "not one of you
Shall do this errand; for a fainting will,
A gasping utterance, and a frightened face
Shall not be bearers of the King's commands
To Dunstan."

Edwin. You said well; no timorous heart
Shall figure me in this.

Clarenbald. To do them right,
They'd charge a Northman in his coat of proof
And flinch not; but this shaveling's meagre face,
With his mass-hackle and his reef and stole,
Puts all to flight.

Edwin. Lo! here's my cousin Athulf.
Ask him to go.

Enter ATHULF.

Clarenbald. My Lord, well met! The King
Would wish his pleasure signified to Dunstan
Touching his coronation. Some there be
That blink the service, lest through sorceries
And conjurations of the villanous Abbot
A curse should cross them; but your brain, we know,
Brooks not such vain bewilderments.

Athulf. I vow
Meat to my mouth goes not with better speed
Than I upon this errand.

Clarenbald. Excellent!

Abounding with all fortitude of soul
I ever knew you. Here's St. Tibba's thumb,
A relic of much price, which ne'er till now
Was parted from me; put it in your vest,
And heartily we bid you well to fare.

SCENE IX.—*A Corridor in a Monastery at Sheen.*

Two Monks.

First Monk. He slept two hours—no more; then raised his head
And said, "Methinks it raineth."
Second Monk. Twice he coughed
And then he spat.
First Monk. He raised himself and said,
"Methinks it raineth"—pointing with his hand;
And as he pointed, lo! it rained apace!
Second Monk. Against such blows what body of mortal man
Could e'er hold out? He's on the way to heaven
Unless he deal more mildly with his flesh.
First Monk. He raised his body—which is just his bones—
Upon one hand, and crossed himself and groaned.
And Father Bridferth met me in the court,
And quoth he, "Hast thou seen the holy Dunstan?"

I answered, "Yes, and on his wasted hand
Red stains that spurted from the nightly scourge."
Second Monk. Nightly and daily, brother. At this hour
He plies it for a double "De Profundis."
As I passed out——

Enter ATHULF, *attended by the King's Jester*, GRIMBALD.

Athulf. God save you, holy Sirs!
Is Father Dunstan here?
Second Monk. My son, he is.
He rose at five. I gave him his hair shirt.
First Monk. At four he called for me and sate upright,
And on his hand appeared——
Athulf. I pray you tell him
Earl Athulf, on an errand from the King,
Would be beholden to his courtesy
For some three minutes of his time.
Second Monk. My Lord,
Unless your business be of instant haste
He hardly will bestow himself so early
On aught of secular concernment.
Athulf. No?
But, Sirs, it is in haste—in haste extreme—
Matters of State, and hot with haste.
Second Monk. My Lord,

We will so say, but truly at this present
He is about to scourge himself.
Athulf. I'll wait.
For a King's ransom would I not cut short
So good a work. I pray you, for how long?
Second Monk. For twice the "De Profundis"—sung in slow time.
Athulf. Please him to make it ten times, I will wait.
And could I be of use, this knotted trifle,
This dog-whip here, has oft been worse employed.
First Monk. My Lord, we'll bring you to the room where stand
The poor, whose feet he washes after penance,
Whence you may see him in the oratory
Plying the blood-stained lash. Tread softly, Sirs,
For he were not well pleased were he to know
That strangers' eyes beheld him.

SCENE X.—*An Oratory.*

DUNSTAN, *in a shirt of sackcloth, stained with blood, reclines on a pallet of straw.* ODO *stands near him. Two* Choristers *are closing their books.*

Odo. How farest thou, brother?
Dunstan. Brother, weak in flesh
But strong in spirit. Choristers, retire.
[*Exeunt* Choristers.

Brother, behoves us to compel our thoughts
An instant from above, and on this world,
Its temporalities and secular cares,
Turn them, so long averted. Say, in brief,
What tidings hear'st thou?

Odo. Still a gathering round
Of the King's forces, trooping to the call
Of Rehoboam's councillor, rash Earl Athulf.

Dunstan. Son of perdition, he affronts his fate!
But there are more than he.

Odo. At Hastings still
Earl Leolf stands aloof; but holds his power
In present preparation.

Dunstan. Brother, lo!
With blasting and with mildew shall they perish!
With madness, blindness, and astonishment
Shall they be smitten, the young man and the virgin,
Terror within them and a sword without!
One way against us shall their host come forth,
And seven ways flee before us.—What is this?

ATHULF *is heard without, singing:*

Sinks the sun with a smile,
Though his heart's in his mouth,
And night comes the while
With a sigh from the south.

Like them, Love, are you,
In your coming and flying,
For you smiled me adieu,
And you welcome me sighing.

Dunstan. What mumming knave is here?—Brother,
I say,
Their host shall flee; the anger of the Just
Shall smoke against them.—Nay, again! What, ho!

GRIMBALD *is heard without, singing:*

There was a maid that was a jade,
Four lovers true had she?
One did so dote that he cut his own throat,
And she poisoned the other three.

Dunstan. What, ho! are we attended? Are there
none
To keep the precincts?

GRIMBALD'S *song continued.*

From this we learn to see and discern,
Nor hotly to desire
A maid whose store of lovers is more
Than her just needs require.

Enter BRIDFERTH (DUNSTAN'S *Chaplain*).

Dunstan. What vile noise is this
Of juggling mountebanks that bellow and sing?
Bridferth. Sir, the Earl Athulf, from my Lord the
King,
Accompanied by his Highness's chief jester,
Expects the end of your observances,
And entertains his patience.

Odo. Insolent scoffer!

Dunstan. The King hath sent him? Nay then, bring him here.

[*Exit* BRIDFERTH.

Grimbald (*heard again*).

Up and away! We'll be merry to-day,
For my father's in jail and my mother's gone gay.

Odo. Attended by a jester! Is't not monstrous?
The jester shall to prison, if not the Earl;
He shall be whipped, and make a jest of that.

Dunstan. Brother, not so. A grave occasion this,
Which calls us to account and bids be still
All outward flourishes of empty ire.
Far looks the present hour and sees beyond
A fertile future. Brother, in our brains,
Not in our bloods, are we to seek the seeds
Wherewith to sow it.

Enter ATHULF.

Welcome, Sir, to Sheen!

Athulf. My Lord Archbishop, and my good Lord Abbot,
I crave your blessing. Summons from the King
I bring you both, that you attend the court
At Kingston, on St. Austin's Eve, to grace
His coronation, and therein perform
Each your fit function: then and there, Lord Primate,

You shall anoint him King, and you, my Lord,
As is your right, shall with the golden spurs
Adorn and illustrate the royal heels.

Dunstan. Sir Earl, all rights that in the Church reside,
And in ourselves, at all times stand we prompt
To exercise; and on St. Austin's Eve,
Obedient alway to the King—next God—
As He shall give us guidance shall we walk.

Athulf. I will so say. The King expects your aid,
But in default thereof, his head and heels
Will punctually upon St. Austin's Eve
Be otherwise attended. Fare you well!

[*Exit.*

Dunstan. Ho, ho! Sir Earl; say'st thou St. Austin's Eve?
Look to thy sister!

Odo. Nay, it shall not be.

Dunstan. The wedding shall not; for the rest compound.
If, as their wanton bearing seems to boast,
It cannot be withstood, lo! give it way.
This weakling, Edwin, from the arms escaped
Of Ethbaal's daughter, the Zidonian quean,
As amiably shall answer to our call
As a tame culver.

Odo. Were he but escaped!

Dunstan. As with gross appetite he now enjoys
(If insight fail me not) the all of folly,

So shall we see him soon agape for change,
Loathing his love foregone. Yield, brother, yield.
Yet hold your force the while not less alert
To answer each event. Be armed within,
Be gowned without. Good brother, yield, but stand.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—LEOLF'S *Castle, in the neighbourhood of Hastings.*

Emma (*alone*). He walks upon the beach. A mind perturbed
Shall find the sea companionable. His
Is sorely troubled or my comment errs,
That is not uninspired. Oh, dearest Leolf!
You see not me with love-discerning eyes,
As I see you, or you would pity me.
When last I saw you, stately was your strength,
And you are now a very noble ruin.
Might I but be the wild flower on the wall
Of that war-wasted tower! A weed, alas!
But with a perfume.—Were I but at court
Soon should I see what currents cross him there.
The King? And if it be . . . Here's my soft slave.
Now to your work, my plotting, scheming brains,
And I shall thrive.

Enter ERNWAY.

Well, Ernway, friend, what cheer?

Ernway. I thank you, I am well in health. My heart
Is heavy, as you know.

Emma. 'Tis a good heart;
But pitch me overboard this sand and gravel.
With a light heart a meagre wit may pass;
Or with a copious wit a heavy heart;
But when the ship that's vacant of a freight
Labours with nothing but the dead-weight . . .

Ernway. Hush!
Although you love me not, you should not scorn me,
Lest some day you be scorned yourself.

Emma. 'Tis true;
I should be gentle; and, good faith! I love you;
Not amorously, I own, but amicably.
You are a kind and most affectionate fool,
And beautiful besides. I love your eyes,
Your hair, your mouth, your chin; I love you piecemeal;
I love your softness, gracefulness, and warmth;
And putting you together, on the whole
I like to see you at my heart's gate sit
Upon a winter's day and toss you crumbs.
Such is my friendship, and this many a day
I have not taxed you for returns. But now . . .

Ernway. What can I do?

Emma. What will you?

Ernway. Nay, what not?
If my weak wit, that you despise so much,
Can compass it, I'll do it.
Emma. Will you lie?
Ernway. For you I will: I would not for myself.
Emma. Thou art a virtuous youth and loving liar.
'Tis better than to be a lying lover;
And yet not good—and would you not be good?
Ernway. As good as you—no better.
Emma. I your conscience!
'Tis much to have one soul to answer for!
Yet will I make you sin. As good as I?
I am a liar and a cheat. Now say—
Will you be like me?
Ernway. I have said I will.
Emma. You will get nothing for it.
Ernway. Not a smile?
Emma. A smile at most—assuredly not more.
Ernway. I am content to lie and cheat for that.
Emma. You come from court. There's much of service there
Is of that kind and in that coin requited.
Now you will instantly to court again,
And for the service you can do—'tis this,
To take me with you.
Ernway. I would kneel for years
But for the blessing of a morning dream
That told me you would ask me this in truth.

Emma. I tell you, you shall do it. But there's more.
Think not that I will let the word go forth
That I have wandered from my home with you
Unwedded. You must say we're man and wife.
Ernway. And will you marry me?
Emma. What, I? Oh no.
Ernway. At last you will.
Emma. No, neither last nor first.
Ernway. Well, I shall fancy that you will; of that
You cannot hinder me.
Emma. Indeed I can;
And if your fancy once should err so far
I will disforest its demesne for ever,
That nothing wild or free shall wander there;
Dispark its parks, dismantle and destroy
Its cloud-built castles. You are to present
The shadow of a husband—nothing more,
And this but for a season. Oh! my heart!
Dear Ernway, I will not torment you much;
And sooth to say, I'm sorry for your pain.
To-morrow, for a sin you've not committed
I'll teach you to entreat a false forgiveness.
You must ask pardon of your worthy sire
For a clandestine marriage. He will storm,
But heed him not. There, you may kiss my hand;
And now, I pray you, go.
Ernway. Good-bye, sweet Emma.

Emma. Call me "Dear Wife"—"Sweet Emma" is too loving;
'Tis an unmarried phrase; whereas "Dear Wife"
Imports the decencies of dry affection.
Ernway. No, I will say, "Sweet Emma."
Emma. What you will
When we're alone. Come with me to the beach.

SCENE II.—*The Sea-shore, near Hastings.*

Leolf (alone). Rocks that beheld my boyhood! Perilous shelf
That nursed my infant courage! Once again
I stand before you—not as in other days
In your grey faces smiling—but like you
The worse for weather. Here again I stand,
Again and on the solitary shore
Old ocean plays as on an instrument,
Making that ancient music, when not known!
That ancient music, only not so old
As He who parted ocean from dry land
And saw that it was good. Upon mine ear,
As in the season of susceptive youth,
The mellow murmur falls—but finds the sense
Dull'd by distemper; shall I say—by time?
Enough in action has my life been spent
Through the past decade, to rebate the edge

Of early sensibility. The sun
Rides high, and on the thoroughfares of life
I find myself a man in middle age,
Busy and hard to please. The sun shall soon
Dip westerly,—but oh! how little like
Are life's two twilights! Would the last were first
And the first last! that so we might be soothed
Upon the thoroughfares of busy life
Beneath the noon-day sun, with hope of joy
Fresh as the morn—with hope of breaking lights,
Illuminated mists and spangled lawns
And woodland orisons and unfolding flowers,
As things in expectation.—Weak of faith!
Is not the course of earthly outlook thus
Reversed from Hope, an argument to Hope
That she was licensed to the heart of man
For other than for earthly contemplations,
In that observatory domiciled
For survey of the stars? The night descends,
They sparkle out.—Who comes? 'Tis Wulfstan's daughter.

Enter EMMA.

Emma (*to Ernway in the side-scene*). Go now and bring my father.—Good my Lord,
I fear you've fallen in love with solitude.
Leolf. A growing weakness—not so tyrannous yet

But that I still can welcome from my heart
My pretty friend.
Emma. I thank you, my good Lord.
Leolf. You find me here discoursing to the sea
Of ebbs and flows; explaining to the rocks
How from the excavating tide they win
A voice poetic, solacing though sad,
Which when the passionate winds revisit them
Gives utterance to the injuries of time.
Poets, I told them, are thus made.
Emma. My Lord,
It is not thus through injury, I would hope,
That you are made poetical?
Leolf. Indeed
There's much that has gone wrong with me, my friend.
How wears the world with you?
Emma. Truly, my Lord,
I see so little of it, I thank God!
That like a wedding garment seldom used
It keeps its shine.
Leolf. Why, then, the world wears well:
But where's the wedding garment?
Emma. Why, my Lord,
'Tis here—for I was married as you see me.
Leolf. Was married, say you?
Emma. Yes, my Lord, last week;
O' Wednesday, God forgive me!
Leolf. This is strange!

I pray you say to whom?

Emma. Alack, my Lord!
To a poor foolish follower of your Lordship's—
Poor Ernway.

Leolf. What! to him?

Emma. For fault of better.
Maids that are beggars cannot, you know, be choosers.

Leolf. Well, if you like him I am glad you have him,
And I will mend his fortunes for your sake.

Emma. I care not for his fortunes. Oh, my Lord
Your pardon! But I care for nothing now
Save only this,—that you should break the news
To my dear father, and on my behalf
Crave his forgiveness; for he dreams not of it.

Leolf. He will but dream when he has heard it. Still
This life, and all that it contains, to him
Is but a tissue of illuminous dreams
Filled with book-wisdom, pictured thought, and love
That on its own creations spends itself.
All things he understands, and nothing does.
Profusely eloquent in worthiest praise
Of action, he will talk to you as one
Whose wisdom lay in dealings and transactions;
Yet so much action as might tie his shoe
Cannot his will command; himself alone
By his own wisdom not a jot the gainer.
Of silence and the hundred thousand things
'Tis better not to mention, he will speak,

And still most wisely.—But, behold him there!
Led by your bridegroom, (is it not?) who now
Runs back.

Emma. Some fifty yards he has to come,
And holding us before him full in sight,
It may be he will find his way to join us.
But lest he wander and forget himself,
I will conduct him hither.

[*Exit.*

Leolf. Ernway! Him!
Poets have said that 'tis the immortal mind
And not the face or form that moves to love.
They spoke as they would have it. Yet 'tis strange
That such a maid should so bestow herself.
But with her courage and her confidence,
Her soft sagacity and ready wit,
Mixes the woman's weakness. For the sire,
He will but aptly moralize the theme,
And then forget the fact.

Enter EMMA *with* WULFSTAN THE WISE.

Wulfstan. For from his youth
His converse hath been profitable; yea,
In teaching him instruction made rebound
And I was wiser for my pains. In truth,
I have considered and have studied him
With peradventure more of curious care
And critical inquiry than befits

A friend so inward; and I'll vouch for this,
That though, as you have said, the vernal bloom
Of his first spirits fading leaves him changed,
'Tis not to worse. His mind is as a meadow
Of various grasses, rich and fresh beneath,
But o'er the surface some that come to seed
Have cast a colour of sobriety.
For he was ever . . .

Emma. But, my dearest father,
He stands before you.

[*Exit.*

Wulfstan. By my life, 'tis true!
Well met, my good Lord and my excellent friend!
My daughter warns me of some tiding strange,
Surprising, unimaginable, by you
To be delivered.

Leolf. Strange it needs must seem;
But should it grieve you, call to mind, I pray,
The precept I have heard a thousand times
From your own lips: philosophy, you said,
If ministering not to practice, were more vain
Than a child's rattle, for the infant's mind
The rattle doth in practice hold at rest.

Wulfstan. 'Tis true; for just philosophy and practice
Are of correlative dependency,
Neither without the other apt or sound
Or certain. For philosophy itself
Smacks of the age it lives in, nor is true

Save by the apposition of the present;
And truths of olden time, though truths they be,
And living through all time eternal truths,
Yet want the seasoning and applying hand
Which Nature sends successive; else the need
Of wisdom should wear out and wisdom cease,
Since needless wisdom were not to be wise;
For surely if . . .

Leolf. The theme I have to broach
Respects a certain marriage, which for my sake,
Though it will certes take you unprepared,
Yet you must leniently look upon
And auspicate with smiles.

Wulfstan. A marriage say you?
My good Lord, I rejoice in your resolve.
To marry wisely is to double wisdom,
And breed a progeny of bright rewards,
Which wisdom single, monachal or lay,
Woefully wants. For think what it must be
To watch in solitude our own decay,
Jealously asking of our observation
If ears, or eyes, or brains, or body fail,
And not to see the while new bodies, brains,
New eyes, new ears, about us springing fresh,
And to ourselves more precious than are ours.
But this it is . . .

Leolf. I give you my consent
That a wise marriage is the crowning act

Which queenly Wisdom's sovereignty secures ;
For love is wisdom, when 'tis innocent :
But for myself . . .

Wulfstan. The season comes with you
When love that's innocent may well be wise.
But not inevitably one with wisdom
Is innocent love at all times and with all.
Love changes with the changing life of man :
In our first youth, sufficient to itself,
Heedless of all beside, it reigns alone,
Revels or storms and spends itself in passion :
In middle age—a garden through whose soil
The roots of neighbouring forest trees have crept,—
It strikes on stringy customs bedded deep,
Perhaps on alien passions ; still it grows
And lacks not force nor freshness ; but this age
Shall aptly choose as answering best its own
A love that clings not nor is exigent,
Encumbers not the active purposes
Nor drains their source ; but proffers with free grace
Pleasure at pleasure touched, at pleasure waived,
A washing of the weary traveller's feet,
A quenching of his thirst, a sweet repose
Alternate and preparative, in groves
Where loving much the flower that loves the shade
And loving much the shade that that flower loves,
He yet is unbewildered, unenslaved,
Thence starting light and pleasantly let go

When serious service calls.

Leolf. 'Tis all most wise,
And worded well. But you mistake my drift;
'Tis of your daughter's marriage, not of mine,
I am to speak.

Wulfstan. My daughter, my good Lord!
Must she be married?

Leolf. 'Twas her will to be;
And upon Wednesday she gave it way.

Wulfstan. Was married upon Wednesday! It is strange!
She was a child but yesterday, and now
A woman and a wife! On Wednesday—
And unto whom, I pray you, was she married?

Leolf. To one whose comeliness in woman's eye
Excels the gifts of fortune that he wants;
To one whose innocence in the eye of Heaven
Excels the excellence of an erring wit:
To Ernway.

Wulfstan. You astonish me, my Lord.
It is most strange; indeed, 'tis singular!
She never mentioned it to me.

Leolf. In that
She missed of what was filially due
To a kind parent, for which lapse through me
She craves forgiveness.

Wulfstan. I have lost my child!

Leolf. Nay, nay, my worthy friend.

Wulfstan. My Lord, 'tis so;
She is my daughter, but no more my child;
And therein is a loss to parents' hearts
Exceeding great.

Enter an Officer.

Officer. My Lord, there's news from court;
They seek you at the castle, whither is come
Oscar, that's so much trusted of Earl Athulf,
With letters.

Leolf. Of what purport, did he say?
Does all go well?

Officer. To take his word, my Lord,
They speak of nothing but prosperity.
My Lord Archbishop, with a loyal will,
Abets the coronation, in whose wake
Comes my Lord Abbot Dunstan, his lean cheek
Surprised with smiles. So smoothly runs the realm
Missives are sent to each confederate Earl
To bid his power disband; and these to you
Are of that import.

Leolf. Is it so? Oh, Athulf!
Art thou not over-reached? I fear it much.
Dunstan in smiles? A presage to be feared.
I would I were at Kingston with my power.
Conceive you what this smiling may portend?

Wulfstan. You read it as the scholiast of mankind
Should ever read their acts, conjunctively,

Interpreting the several by the whole.

Leolf. Then, Hederic, we will expedite the levies.
The daylight's lengthened by yon rounding moon.
Long marches and short nights—and so to Kingston.

SCENE III.—*Kingston. A Chamber leading to the Banqueting Hall in the Palace.—The* Dish-Thane *passes through, followed by other* Officers *of the Household, by* Attendants *bearing dishes, and by the* Female Cup-bearer. *In the back of the scene are a motley crowd, consisting of* Musicians *tuning their instruments, Two* Fortune-tellers, HEIDA *and* THORBIORGA; GRIMBALD, *the* King's *Jester;* BRIDFERTH, DUNSTAN'S *Chaplain; a few* Monks *and secular* Priests, *several* Thanes *of the second rank,* Ceorls *and* Soldiers. *The Persons of the scene are in constant movement, changing their situations or passing in and out, some eagerly, others idly. Once or twice an* Earl *or* Ealderman *passes through, but without stopping or mixing with the crowd, which reverently makes way. The parties who are heard to speak are those who pass in front or pause there.*

1*st Monk.* So! crowned at last! God's will be done!
At times
His will it is, for ends best known to Him,
To grant a holiday to Beelzebub,
And there is feasting and a dance in Hell.

1st Soldier. In the north aisle was I and saw it all.

2nd Soldier. The bailiff (curse him!) broke my head with his staff
Or I had got there too.

1st Soldier. Most royally
His Highness played his part from first to last,
And graciously and grandly. At the Abbot
Methought he looked askance, but with the rest . . .

[*They pass.*

1st Monk. In the south aisle. He faltered as he swore
To keep the Church in peace.

2nd Monk. His cheek was pale.

1st Monk. It was as white as leprosy.

Bridferth. No marvel,
For such an eye was on him in that hour
As smote Gehazi.

[*They pass.*

A Thane (*who advances in company with a Scholar*).
Hark ye! are we blind?
The Princess was led in by brave Earl Athulf;
And didst thou mark the manner of it, ha?

Scholar. Methought she leaned upon him and toward him
With a most graceful timid earnestness;
A leaning more of instinct than of purpose,
And yet not undesigned. But think you then . . .

[*They pass.*

Heida (*sings to a harp*).

She was fresh and she was fair,
Glossy was her golden hair;
Like a blue spot in the sky
Was her clear and loving eye.

He was true and he was bold,
Full of mirth as he could hold;
Through the world he broke his way
With jest and laugh and lightsome lay.

Love ye wisely, love ye well;
Challenge then the gates of Hell.
Love and truth can ride it out,
Come bridal song or battle shout.

1st Priest. Our gallant Heretoch, the good Earl Leolf,
Should have been there methought.

2nd Priest. He should have been;
But there are reasons, look ye,—reasons—mum—
Most excellent reasons—softly—in your ear——

[*They pass.*

Thorbiorga (*sings*).

He stood on the rock,
And he looked on the sea,
And he said of his false Love,
"My Love, where is she?

"Have they bought her with bracelets
And lured her with gold?
Is her love for her lover
A tale that is told?"

From the crest of the wave,
In the deep of the gulf,
Came a voice that cried, "Save!
For behold the sea-wolf!"

He stood on the rock,
And he looked at the wave,
And he said, "Oh, St. Ulfrid!
Who's this that cries, Save!"

Then arose from the billow
A head with a crown,
And two hands that divided
The hair falling down.

As the foam in the moonlight
The two hands were fair,
And they put by the tangles
Of seaweed and hair.

He knew the pale forehead—
A spell to his ear
Was the voice that repeated,
"The sea-wolf is here!"

"I come, Love," he answered:—
At sunrise next day
A fisherman wakened
The Priest in the Bay:

"For the soul of a sinner
Let masses be said—
The sin shall be nameless,
And nameless the dead."

Enter the Great Chamberlain *with the* Horse-Thane *and other* Officers *of the Household.*

Great Chamberlain. His Highness! Ho! Make way.
His Highness! Ho!
Sound trumpets!

[*A flourish of trumpets.*

[*The* KING, *wearing his Crown, and leading in the* QUEEN MOTHER, *passes across the back-scene, and is followed by* EARL ATHULF, *leading in* ETHILDA, *by* ODO *and* DUNSTAN, *with* SIGERIC *and* BRIDFERTH, *by* HARCATHER, CEOLWULF, ÆTHELRIC, EADBALD, IDA, BRAND, ECFRID, GORF *and* TOSTY, *all military leaders on the Monastic side; and by* CLARENBALD, EARL SIDROC, *the* BISHOP OF ROCHESTER, *and divers great* Officers *of State and* Nobles *of the* King's *party. The procession, when it passes off, enters the Banqueting Hall.*

1st Ceorl. The King stepped proudly.

2nd Ceorl. But his countenance
Methought was troubled. Is he well in health?

1st Ceorl. Now comes the Primate.

2nd Ceorl. What, can this be he
That looks so fierce and haughty? Once before
I saw him, when a cripple asked for alms;
So lowly of demeanour was his Grace,
I had not known, but for the mitred head,
Which was the beggar, which the Lord Archbishop.

1st Ceorl. He's humble to the poor to spite the rich;
Give me the man that's humble to his peers.

2nd Ceorl. There's Dunstan.

1st Ceorl. What, is yonder thing alive?

Grimbald (*the Jester, who has come up behind*). Sir, he's aboveground.

2nd Ceorl. So we see, my friend.

Grimbald. For this occasion, Sir. A hole i' the earth
Is where he lives, Sir, mostly: yea, his life
Is of the earth, Sir, earthy.

1st Ceorl. It was there
That he encountered Sathanas.

Grimbald. 'Twas there.
The Devil, Sir, one day, grubbing for earth-nuts—
A simple fare you'll say, but for his ends
The Devil you'll find can be a very hermit—
Digging and grubbing—what should his old claws clutch
But Father Dunstan's skull! "Ho, ho!" cried he,
"A bigger one than ever;" but thereat . . .
Oh mercy! here is Gurmo!—Sirs, I say,
The feasting and the singing and the dancing
Should carry us to midnight—Cockadoodle!

A song will I sing
Of an excellent King
That carried his crown where a bee has her sting.

Enter from the Banqueting Hall Two Ushers.

1st Usher. The third cup has gone round. You're welcome now
To take your places at the lower board.

Grimbald. In, tag-rag—enter, rabblement—in, all!

And to him the Queen said,
"Sure your senses are fled,
Put your boots in that place and your crown on your head."

In, dregs ; in, scum ; in, commonalty, in !
In, many fools by nature, one by name !

[*Exeunt into the Banqueting Hall, all but the* Ushers *and the* Scholar.

1st Usher. The Princess and a certain Earl sit close.

Scholar. Ah ! she is peerless ! Happy were the man
That should enthrall her though she were a peasant !
What in another might have seemed amiss
In her was but a freshness and new charm
Loosed from the graceful nakedness of nature.
She ate but half a pigeon, and did you mark
How with her tiny fingers and her teeth
She gnawed and tore the bones, talking 'twixt whiles,
With such a lively and a pretty action,
That appetite itself and all its ways
Seemed mainly spiritual.

2nd Usher. Hush ! Hark to that !

[*A flourish of trumpets.*

1st Usher. The ladies leave the board.

Scholar. I'll see her go.
She ever moves as if she moved to music.
Are you not wanted? Oh ! what's like to her?

SCENE IV.—*A Chamber in the Palace.*

Enter EMMA.

Emma. Credentials? yes—Earl Leolf's may go far ;

But truly I was made to thrive at court
With or without them, being merry and wise.
They trust to me already as to one
That works by miracle; and can I not
To clear the proud Elgiva from the path
Of lovelorn Leolf? Married shall she be
Or e'er the sun go down; so shall his wound,
Though deep, have rest and heal. Could twenty Kings
Have turned aside my heart, or in mine eyes
Possessed one-twentieth part the sovereignty
That crowns his kingly head!

Enter ERNWAY.

In time for once.
Take this to Sheen. Seek Father Ricola out;
Tell him the King shall follow in an hour,
And then Elgiva.—Ernway, if thou lov'st me,
Be sudden and be secret.

Ernway. Trust me, Emma,
I will be both.

Emma. Here is the private stair
Which brings you past the ward, and with this key . . .
How dark it is! Be careful how you step.

SCENE V.—*The Banqueting Hall.—Are seated at the board, all the Male Guests who passed through in the Third Scene. But the* King's *place is vacant. Goblets are passed from hand to hand.* GRIMBALD *the Jester stands behind the chair of state.*

Harcather. Comes not the King again?
Ceolwulf. Surely he will.
Tosty. He will! Nay, nay, he must.
Dunstan. Content yourselves;
It cannot be but he will come again.
He cannot mean us such disparagement
As thus, and at this high and solemn feast,
To quit his guests, the noblest of the land,
Without a "God be with you," or a word
To sheathe the sharp directness and the sting
Of such a plain offence.
Ida. 'Twere good, my Lords,
We sent our humble duty to the King,
Craving his expedite return.
Great Chamberlain. Grith, Offa,
Go seek the King; and say his noble guests
Find themselves by his absence overcast
As with a cloud, and crave his swift return.

[*Exeunt* GRITH *and* OFFA.

Grimbald.

Betwixt the new ship and the headland old
The dolphins ducked and the waters rolled.

Worse and more of it ! the wind went mad—
But the pilot he drank no more than he had.

Tosty. Peace, fool ! The very hour that he could spare us . . .

Ceolwulf. A singular and unadvised retreat.

Tosty. I say if one of us—I say if I . . .

Sidroc. Well, well, he's young.

Tosty. I say, my Lords, if I,
Not being sick nor drunk, jump from my seat,
And turn on this illustrious company
My back, that is not comelier nor more pleasant
Nor acceptabler than another man's,
Why, then, my Lords, let me be who I may,
I say I offer to this company,
Not being drunk, a strange discourtesy,
And quite the obverse of a salutation.

Æthleric. Bear this, and we shall . . .

Clarenbald. Tut ! he'll come again.
Pass round the goblet. Eadric, take the harp,
And sweeten our carouse with minstrelsy.

SONG.

In the hall of Leodwulf was made good cheer ;
On the board was a bowl, by the wall was a spear ;
The spear and the bowl looked each at each,
And the thoughts that rose in them wrought to speech.

Bowl.

Thou in the corner so grim and spare,
Who sent thee hither ? What dost thou there ?

Spear.

I came of the ash-tree Ygdrasil,
And do her bidding for woe or weal.

Bowl.

For whom the weal, for whom the woe?

Spear.

Say who thou art, and thou shalt know.

Bowl.

Broach the cask and fill me full—
I am the bold Logbrogdad's skull.

Spear.

Thou liest, or else thou leak'st; for once
I pierced the bold Logbrogdad's sconce.

Bowl.

I neither lie nor leak. Behold!
The hole is here and pieced with gold.

Spear.

I pray thee grace. 'Twas through that hole
Passed out the bold Logbrogdad's soul.

Bowl.

Then answer make that all may know,
For whom the weal, for whom the woe?

Spear.

The weal is their's who do no wrong,
And crown with gifts the sons of song.
The woe is theirs who fain would flood
Their father's land with brethren's blood.
Their deeds the eagle and the kite
Shall judge, and God shall guard the right.

[*Re-enter* GRITH *and* OFFA.]

Great Chamberlain. How now?

Offa. My Lords, his Highness greets you well.
He bids us say that he has calls elsewhere,
And loves not too much quaffing, which is wont
To leave you with less reason than the beasts,
Rolling upon the floor. Wherefore, my Lords,
He prays you with all love and courtesy
To hold his Grace excused, for he is young,
And loves not quaffing.

Odo. Will ye suffer this?
If rated thus for nothing, what's your fate
When standing for your liberties ye check him?
If thus affronted at the festive board,
What in the Witenagemót awaits you?

Tosty. He loves not quaffing!

Harcather. Rolling on the floor!

Athulf. Sirs, for his Highness's too hasty message,
I grant it ill-advised; but, Sirs, his youth,
If ye will temperately consider . . .

Harcather. Youth!
Hath youth a privilege to maltreat the old?

Ecfrid. He loves not quaffing! Ah, my good Lord Athulf,
But what else loves he? There are sins beside.
Say he had left us for a lady's bower—
There is a revelling he impugns not.

Dunstan. Ha!

Ecfrid. What lady she may be, my good Lord Athulf,
Concerns not us.

Odo. Ho ! some of you go forth
And seek the King, and say to him from me
That he, or willingly or not, perforce
Must instantly return ; and see ye bring him.

Athulf. Whoso shall take that errand from this hall,
Let him take that therewith.

[*Throws his glove on the floor. Three or four* Earls *start up in their seats. In the mean time* GURMO *has entered, and spoken apart to* DUNSTAN.

Dunstan (*rising*). My Lords, sit still. I'll bring the boy myself.
Here, varlets, sweep this litter from the floor.

[*Spurns the glove with his foot as he passes and exit.*

Athulf (*his hand on his sword*). Which of you here that wears not frock nor hood
Will this vile Abbot's vilest act avouch ?

[*Several* Earls *of the Monachal party lay their hands on their swords and spring upon the floor. The company rises in disorder.*

Seneschal. Peace, ho ! My Lords, bethink ye where ye are ;
He that within the palace draws his sword
Doth forfeit an Earl's were. Peace, peace, be still !
Keep the King's peace !

Harcather. Not I, for one.

Tosty. Nor I.

Others. Nor I ; nor I.

Seneschal. Then who will keep it not
Let him withdraw, and not pollute with blood
The precincts of the palace.

Eadbald. Then withdraw.

Many voices. Withdraw ! withdraw !

Harcather. Keep the King's peace? If longer than three minutes
I keep it, may I die in my bed like a cow !

SCENE VI.—*An Apartment leading to an Oratory in the Royal Residence at Sheen.—As the scene opens,* EDWIN *and* ELGIVA *are discovered before the altar in the Oratory, and* RICOLA, *the* King's *Chaplain, is joining their hands. They all three then advance out of the Oratory to the front.*

Ricola. So be ye one from this time forth for ever,
And God for ever be your gracious guide
In love and peace to live ! A hasty rite
Hath solemnized your nuptials ; not the less
Be ye observant of the sacred bonds
Wherein ye stand contracted for all time.
My Sovereign Lord and Lady, ye are young,
And these are times and yours beyond compare
Stations of trial : Be ye each to each
Helpful, and fullest of comfort, next to God.
And so, my blessing poured in tears upon you,

I bid you well to fare.

Edwin. My honoured friend,
We thank you for this service, one of many,
But of the many greatest. For awhile
Our secret kept, the Queen abides with you.
I must return to Kingston; but ere night
Once more you'll see me here. Farewell till then.
Shortly the Queen shall follow you.

[*Exit* RICOLA.

Elgiva!
Oh, past expression beautiful and dear,
And now my own for ever! Let my soul
Be satisfied, for 'tis a joy so great
To know you mine, that nature for my bound
Seems insufficient, and my spirit yearns
Intent with you to pass from this pale earth
Into that rosy and celestial clime
Where life is ever thus.

Elgiva. How joy fulfilled
Makes the heart tremble! Now no change can come
That is not to be feared.

Re-enter RICOLA.

Ricola. My Lord, my Liege,
Forgive me—but I fear . . . I'm old, my Lord,
And shake at trifles, but I strangely fear
That mischief is afoot.

Edwin. At Kingston?

Ricola. There,
And coming hitherward; the poor fool Grimbald
Came flying like the scud o' the storm before
To warn you.

Edwin. And what says he? Call him in.

[RICOLA *goes to the door and returns with* GRIMBALD.
Well, my good fool, and what hast thou to tell?

Grimbald.

> There was grace after meat with a fist on the board
> And down went the morat and out flew the sword.

Elgiva. Truce to thy calling for a while, good fool,
And tell us plainly what befell.

Grimbald. By the ears
The nobles went together; in the fray
The Horse-Thane and the Dish-Thane were o'erborne
And sent to prison. Then I took to my heels
To bring you word.

Elgiva. Earl Athulf? Where is he?

Grimbald. He stood against Harcather hand to hand
When I departed; but I know no more.

Enter the QUEEN MOTHER.

Queen Mother. So you are here, my son, and Madam, you!
And is it for this you scurry from your place?
Is it for this you quit your noble guests?
Is it for this you vex the kingdom? Yea,

To shedding of blood—for there has blood been shed—
For nought but this? Oh, fie! for dalliance—oh!
And whiles you waste the hours in wantonness . . .
Edwin. Good mother, speak of what you know. Not here
Was either wantonness or waste of time.
You little think how little idly spent
Has been the hour that's gone.
Queen Mother. How spent? oh, son!
But here come those can speak. Lo! here they come!

Enter DUNSTAN *and* ODO, *with two or three* Thanes *following, who are gradually augmented as the scene proceeds till the stage is filled with* DUNSTAN'S *adherents.*

Ricola. Will't please you to withdraw?
Elgiva. I thank you, no.
Edwin. You are too bold, my Lord Archbishop; hence!
Go hence, and trouble not my privacy.
When I did leave you 'twas my will to leave you.
Am I your King, or am I not?
Odo. Sir, Sir,
'Tis true, with suffrage of the Witena
You were anointed with the holy oil
And crown'd this day by me. But deem not thence
That you are free to spurn us. Rather deem

That calls more urgent, bonds of stricter claim,
Enjoin the duties of your sovereignty;
Amongst which duties eminently first
Is this, that when your Lords and Councillors,
The pillars of the realm, in conference meet,
You should be with them, wisely there to learn
From the assembled wisdom of the State.

Edwin. 'Twas for carousal, not for conference,
They met to-day.

Dunstan. Sirs, stand ye all apart
And suffer that I reason with the King,
Whose youth betrays him. Oh, unruly flesh!
Oh, wanton blood of youth! the primal sin!
The first offender still! The original snare!
Perdition came of Woman, and alway since
When Time was big with mischief and mischance
He felt his forelock in a soft white hand.

Elgiva. Of Woman say'st thou that perdition came?
'Twas of the Serpent, Priest.

Queen Mother. What, break'st thou in?
Thou bold and naughty jade! Thou pit! thou snare!

Edwin. Oh, mother, hold! Know you at whom you rail?
Deem her your daughter or me not your son.

Queen Mother. Thou art not and thou shalt not be my son
If thou demean'st thyself to her—a witch!
A practiser of sorceries!

Edwin (*kneeling*). Oh, God !
I pray Thee that Thou shorten not my days,
Ceasing to honour this disnatured flesh
That was my mother.
Elgiva. Never was she that :
O Edwin, had God granted thee a mother,
What honour had we rendered her !
Dunstan. Thou darest !
And seest thou in what presence ? Be thou warned !
Thy witcheries that inflame this carnal King
Far other fires shall kindle in the Church—
The channel as of mercies, so of wrath.
Thou stand'st before its excellent Archbishop,
And me its humblest minister ; men both
Dead to the flesh and loathing from their souls
To company with women. To us thy charms
Are flat and futile as thy sins are sharp
And spur us to that vengeance God inflicts
Through us on scorners.
Edwin. Heed them not, Elgiva.
Elgiva. Content thee ! never were they heeded less
By God or by His Angels than by me.
Edwin. Insolent Churchmen ! *You* renounce the world !
All in it that is loving or can be loved
You'll teach yourself and others to renounce,
Because cold vanities with meagre heats
Alternate have consumed you to the core

And given your hearts the dry-rot. Meddlesome monks !
The love it is not in you or to feel
For women or from womankind to win
You ostentatiously deny yourselves,
As atrophy denies itself to fatten.

Elgiva. What worth are you to us, that set no store
By you or by your threats ? I tell thee, Priest,
I make no more account of thee and thine
Than of so many kites and crows.

Dunstan. Fly hence,
Pale prostitute ! Avaunt, rebellious Fiend
Which speakest through her !

Edwin. And I tell thee more,
She is thy Sovereign Mistress and thy Queen,
My lawful wedded wife.

Queen Mother. Ah, woe is me !

Odo. Thy lawful wife ! How lawful ? By what law ?
Incest and fornication !

Dunstan. Who art thou ?
I see thee and I know thee—yea, I smell thee !
Again 'tis Satan meets me front to front,
Again I triumph ! Where, and by what rite,
And by what miscreant minister of God
And rotten member, was this mockery,
That was no marriage, made to seem a marriage ?

Ricola. Lord Abbot, by no . . .

Dunstan. What then, was it thou ?
The Church shall cut thee off and pluck thee out !

A Synod shall be summoned! Chains for both!
Chains for that harlot and for this dog-priest!
Oh, wall of Jezreel!

Edwin. Villains, stand ye back!
Stand from the Queen . . . Oh, had I but a sword!
What—felons! Ye shall hang for this ere long—
Loose me or I will . . .

Odo. Sir, be calm, and know
'Tis for your own behoof and for your crown's.

Elgiva. Be of good comfort, Edwin; we shall meet
Where none can part us. Are ye men? Hold off!
I will not put you to that shame to force me.

[*She is taken out.*

Odo. Thou Queen! Go, get thee gone! A crown for thee!
No, nor a head to put it on to-morrow.

Queen Mother. Alack! the law is sharp. But, Gurmo, run,
See she have Christian burial; speed thee, Gurmo.

Dunstan. Madam, your pardon. Gurmo, wait on me.

Edwin. Elgiva, oh, Elgiva! Oh, my wife!
I'll find thee friends, though now . . . Oh, traitors! slaves!
When I have raised my force, I'll bring you bound
With halters round your necks, to lick the dust
Before her footstool. I will have you scourged
By hangmen's hands in every market town—
Yes, you, my Lords!—And, mother, oh! repent,

Or I shall cast thee off and curse the fate
That made thy hateful womb my habitation
Ere my blind soul could choose. Perfidious monk!
Smilest thou, villain! But I will raise a force . . .

[*Exit.*

Dunstan. Lord Primate, thou hast crowned a baby's brow.
May it please you follow lest he come to harm.

[*Exit* ODO.

Friends, quit not my Lord Primate. Follow all.

[*Exeunt all but* HARCATHER, *who stays behind on a sign from* DUNSTAN.

Harcather, haste; convey Elgiva hence
With speed to Chester, and in strictest ward
Confine her there; but keep her life untouched.

[*Exit* HARCATHER.

So shall we brandish o'er the enamoured King
A trenchant terror.—See we next what friends
Will stead us in the Synod.—Break, thou storm!
And learn thou which is strongest, thou or I.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The Castle at Tonbridge.*—LEOLF'S *Army encamped around it.*

OSCAR *and* LEOLF'S Seneschal.

Oscar. I would that Wulfstan might have staid behind;
He hath the Heretoch's ear, and though he's wise
His wisdom is not for the camp; we march
As with a drag-chain.
Seneschal. Nay, good Oscar, nay;
Further we cannot yet; the force in front
Hourly increases; our reserves are late;
And nothing comes from Wessex.

Enter WULFSTAN THE WISE.

Worthy Sir,
Your daughter, as I hear, is married. Well,
It is a blessing if her choice be yours,
And if it be not, still the father's heart
Will give the child God-speed.
Wulfstan. Assuredly.
I did but bid her be less mutable,

Telling her that the past, or worse or better,
If driven in her and experienced home,
Might be as piles whereon to build the future,
Else insecure. I bade her be resolved,
Her choice now planted, forth of it to bring
The fruits of constancy; for constancy
On all things works for good; the barren breeds,
The fluent stops, the fugitive is fixed
By constancy. I told you, did I not,
The story of the wind, how he himself,
The desultory wind, was wrought upon?

Oscar. Yes, Sir; you told it twice.

[*Exit* Seneschal.

Wulfstan. The tale was this:
The wind when first he rose and went abroad
Through the waste region, felt himself at fault,
Wanting a voice; and suddenly to earth
Descended with a wafture and a swoop,
Where wandering volatile from kind to kind
He wooed the several trees to give him one.
First he besought the ash; the voice she lent
Fitfully with a free and lashing change
Flung here and there its sad uncertainties:
The aspen next; a fluttered frivolous twitter
Was her sole tribute: from the willow came,
So long as dainty summer dressed her out,
A whispering sweetness, but her winter note
Was hissing, dry, and reedy: lastly the pine

Did he solicit, and from her he drew
A voice so constant, soft, and lowly deep,
That there he rested, welcoming in her
A mild memorial of the ocean-cave
Where he was born.

Enter LEOLF, *with* EMMA, ERNWAY, *and* GRIMBALD.

Leolf. Unhappy news! last night—
Sorely I grieve—ay, bitterly repent—
Had I been in my place—oh, weak recoil—
But it avails not.—Yesterday, my friends,
Was fruitful in events; the King was crowned,
Was married, was o'ermastered by the monks;
The Queen the while to Chester carried captive,
Earl Athulf to the Tower.

Oscar. In one short day
All this befell?

Wulfstan. Oh, woe-bewildered day!

Grimbald. A shout—a hubbub in the camp—our ears
Are but fool's ears, and yet they hear a shout.

Leolf. A welcome to some friend; as each arrives
They hail him thus, and as the force he brings
Is more or less, so measure they the cry.
This is the loudest I have heard. Look out.

Ernway. I see no force, my Lord; and but one man,
Who hurries hitherward, and as he comes

They crowd him, and with clapping of their hands
And shouting bring him on. See! ·

ATHULF *enters hastily.*

Athulf. Oh, my friend . . .
Leolf . . . Alas! . . . What, Grimbald with you! . . .
Nay,
You know it then already. Think no worse
Of us or of our fortunes than they are.
This half-faced treason will not touch the life.
Ill-starred ambition! Oh, my luckless sister!
But think her not endangered.
Leolf. And yourself?
How came you hither? Were you not in ward?
Athulf. The Princess with a signet of the King's,
Gold of her own, and promises and tears,
Wrought on my guards. They follow me. Oh, Leolf!
You are avenged. My sister, oh, my sister!
She is not and she could not be forgiven!
God's justice . . .
Leolf. Athulf, say no more but this;
She stands within the keeping of God's love.
For earthly aid, 'twill reach her with such speed
As earthly love can minister. The light troops
Shall march with me to Cheshire, leaving you
With the main body of my force and those
That soon will join you, to relieve the King.
So shall I check the rising in the West,

Which we must look for else, and so provide
Against extremities and accidents
That else might hurt the Queen. They muster now
And wait me on the ramparts.

Athulf. I am with you.

[*Exeunt* LEOLF *and* ATHULF.

Oscar. These are sad tidings.

Emma. With a frightful force
They tear Earl Athulf, for his hopes were high
And he was crowding canvas. To his friend,
Whom in a foggy grief they found becalmed,
They come but as a vivifying gust
To quicken what was dead: from this time forth
A cry is in his heart, a trumpet-call
That sounds a summons to the rescue: see
If he obey it not.

Oscar. A settled gloom
Was in his face before.

Emma. A seated pain
Preyed on him inwards.

Wulfstan. Ah! that inward pain!
A lobster, should his limb . . .

Grimbald. Ho! Holla! Ho!
The camp is all in motion. Look! Behold!
The banners fly i' the wind.

Emma. A token this
That we are soon to march. Get we afoot.

[*Exeunt* EMMA, OSCAR, *and* GRIMBALD.

Wulfstan. A lobster, should his limb have eating sores,
Or his articulate coat of mail be pierced,
Snaps the offending member at the joint
And casts it off—such surgery is his;
And as by instinct he, so we by art
Of amputation, easily discard
The outward seats of pain——

Emma (*from behind the scene*). Come, father, come.

Wulfstan. The outward seats of pain—I will, my child.

SCENE II.—*A Chamber in the Tower of London.*

Dunstan (*alone*). Kings shall bow down before thee, said my soul,
And it is even so. Hail, ancient hold!
Thy chambers are most cheerful, though the light
Enter not freely; for the eye of God
Smiles in upon them. Cherished by His smile
My heart is glad within me, and to Him
Shall testify in works a strenuous joy.
—Methinks that I could be myself that rock
Whereon the Church is founded,—wind and flood
Raging and rushing, boisterous in vain.
I thank you, Gracious Powers! Supernal Host!
I thank you that on me, though young in years
Ye put the glorious charge to try with fire,
To winnow and to purge. I hear you call!

A radiance and a resonance from heaven
Surrounds me, and my soul is breaking forth
In strength, as did the new-created sun
When earth beheld it first on the fourth day.
God spake not then more plainly to that orb
Than to my spirit now. I hear the call.
My answer, God, and Earth, and Hell shall hear.
But I could reason with thee, Gracious Power,
For that thou giv'st me to perform thy work
Such sorry instruments. The Primate shakes,
Gunnilda totters.—Gurmo!—And of those
That stand for me more absolutely, most
Are slaves through fear, not saints by faith. But no,
I would not they were worthier; for thus
The work shall be the more mine own.

Enter GURMO.

What now?

Gurmo. You called.

Dunstan. I think I did. Send me those Bishops.

[*Exit* GURMO.

—More eminently mine own. The Church is great,
Is holy, is ineffably divine!
Spiritually seen and with the eye of faith
The body of the Church, lit from within,
Seems but the luminous phantom of a body;
The incorporeal spirit is all in all.

Eternity *à parte post et ante*
So drinks the refuse, thins the material fibre,
That lost in ultimate tenuity
The actual and the mortal lineaments,
The Church in time, the meagre, definite, bare
Ecclesiastical anatomy,
The body of this death, translates itself,
And glory upon glory swallowing all
Makes earth a scarce distinguishable speck
In universal heaven. Such is the Church
As seen by faith; but otherwise beheld,
The body of the Church is searched in vain
To find the sojourn of the soul; 'tis nowhere.
Here are two Bishops, but 'tis not in them.

Enter OSWALD, *Bishop of Worcester, and* ETHELWALD, *Bishop of Winchester.*

Save you, my Lords! Are there no seats? A stool—
Fetch me a stool.

[*A stool is brought, on which* DUNSTAN *seats himself. The* Bishops *continue standing.*

What business brings you here?

Oswald. Lord Abbot, we have served thee faithfully,
And still obeyed thy voice through many a change.
We would that others, who have done no less
In outward show, were inwardly as true.

Dunstan. Who fails?

Ethelwald. We do not say distinctly who,
Nor positively point by point wherein;
But this we say, that we whose hearts are known
From yours inseparable, are no longer prized
By some amongst our brethren as we were.
We hear that Bishops meet by tens and twelves
Unknown to us; we think unknown to you.
We therefore deemed it parcel of our duty
To give you warning.

Dunstan. Is there more?

Oswald. To-day
There spreads a rumour that Prince Edgar's force
Met on the Avon by the Heretoch
Was beaten back and scattered. Joining this
To what is surer, that Earl Athulf's power
Creeps close upon us, sundry citizens
That are of credit with the baser sort
About the suburbs, stir them up to riot.

Dunstan. Doth nothing happen to such men? 'Tis strange;
Good men for whom the Church puts up her prayers
Are daily taken off.

Ethelwald. 'Tis said moreover
The Synod when it meets will not be pure
Nor of one mind.

Dunstan. 'Tis ignorantly said:
I am the Synod's mind. Sirs, you did well
To bring me what had reached you. Leave me now.

Come back at night. The interval use well;
And what you gather give me then to know.
[*Exeunt* Bishops.
This faction runs ahead. What mean they then?
Why, verily to abuse and by their wiles
Betray the Synod. Nothing less. But God,
Who to the Devil incarnate in the snake
Gave subtlety, denies not to His saints
(So they shall use it to His glory and gain)
The weapon He permitted to the fiend.
Erratic Spirit, here thou art, wild worm
Piercing the earth with subterraneous toil,
And there with wings scouring the darkened sky!
Still do I meet thee; still, wherever met,
I foil thee; sometimes as with Michael's sword,
Sometimes as with thine own. To arms! false Fiend;
We meet to-morrow in the assembled Church.

SCENE III.—*Palace of the* Archbishop *in London.*

ODO, *with* LEOFWYN, *Bishop of Lincoln, and* FRIDSTAN *Bishop of Lichfield.*

Odo. It stands not with our honour either way
To be so overridden.
Fridstan. One sole man,
Though he were Saint uprisen, no charter hath
To lead by the nose the fathers of the Church,

The Archbishop and the Bishops. Zeal is good;
But zeal is one thing when it fasts and prays,
And when it ramps and rages 'tis another.

Leofwyn. When he refused the bishopric from Edred
My mind misgave me. Oh, I said, this man
Is humble upside-down. He that rejects
With publication and profession loud
Of lowliness, an orderly advancement,
Looks, be assured, what's orderly to pass,
And leave degrees behind.

Fridstan. Yea, brother, yea;
He that denies himself to be a Bishop
Looks further than is fitting; he means not well;
He thinks to say to us, Go here, go there;
Me, Dunstan, standing sole, the gaping world
Shall gaze at, bidding Bishops stand aside.
This is not right.

Leofwyn. No, nor canonical.

Odo. Brethren, when I unfolded all the doubts
That compassed round the cause, the enemy's strength,
The fears, the double faces, the false hearts
That walk amongst us,—reasons all that plead
For caution and some temperate composition,—
He checked and chid me like a troublesome child
That prates at random; bade me know that God
Revealed it otherwise, and he must needs
Believe in God; then calling for a scourge
Said 'twas a time for exercise devout,

And he entreated my good company
For mutual castigation.

Enter SIGERIC.

Sigeric. Honoured Lords,
The wench which had an audience some days since,
Has now returned; an aged man is with her.
Odo. Admit them both.

[*Exit* SIGERIC.

Now we shall find how far
Earl Athulf will be compromised. Come in.

Re-enter SIGERIC, *followed by* EMMA *and* WULFSTAN THE WISE.

Good wench, we have expected thee, and thou
Art welcome—but who's this?
Emma. A man, my Lords,
Known to you all by fame though not by favour;
Wulfstan the Wise.
Odo. Sir, you are welcome too;
Earl Athulf peradventure deems the knot
Of these affairs worthy your skill and care,
Wherein by message he hath dealt till now
Conveyed us through this envoy, weak by sex,
But verily quick-witted. Sir, we know
Your great renown for wisdom and we hail

Your advent hither; for we deem the Earl,
In calling age and wisdom to his aid,
Is wise though young; and if he be, the terms
We offer are what wisdom will commend
And modesty embrace.

Wulfstan. My good Lords, far
Beyond my merits doth my fame extend;
But moderation alway have I praised
And peace ensued, and therefore have been held
To mediate not unfit, when Mars attired
In triple steel on this side shakes his spear,
Bellona upon that side mounts her car
By Flight and Terror drawn.

Odo. You doubtless know
The tenor of our terms,—all regulars
Since Edred's death supplanted to return
Save those who did themselves in Edred's reign
Supplant in benefices duly holden
The secular incumbents—the new Queen
To be acknowledged so soon as the Pope
Shall grant his dispensation. Even you,
Though secular yourselves, must see in this
The scales of justice balanced. To these terms
What saith the brave Earl Athulf?

Emma. Me, my Lords,
Earl Athulf charged with what from him proceeds;
What from my father (for he is my father)
You hear, be pleased to value at its worth

As his, but not the Earl's.

Leofwyn. The Earl is wise;
The starling shall be true to what she's taught,
Whilst birds of divination—well—the matter—
How is the Earl inclined to us?

Emma. My Lords,
The Earl inclines; but ere he shall impledge
Or the Lord Heretoch or himself, he looks
To be assured the Synod late convened
For other ends, will wisdom learn from you,
And set its seal to this.

Odo. The Earl demands
No more than what is just and right. To-morrow
The Synod meets, and if our voice prevail
Will ratify the terms. But Dunstan still
His purpose holds, and it is rumoured now
Hath secret intercourse with Rome, for ends
Unknown to us.

Leofwyn. Earl Athulf doubtless knows
The motion may not from ourselves proceed,
But let it be propounded on his part,
Or by the seculars before the Synod,
And we shall so foreshape the minds of men
That by the acclaim of most, if not of all,
It shall be hailed acceptable.

Emma. My Lords,
The Earl forgot not this, and therefore sends
With me my father, that persuasively

He may, according to his gifts, impart
The proffered compact, with the instances
That recommend it to the assembled Church;
Trusting to you to second and support
What he delivers.

Odo. Sir, be not afraid,
But speak it roundly.

Emma. Oh, my Lords, for that,
The spirit within him, when it works to speech,
Fears neither Saint nor Devil.

Leofwyn. That is well.
Yet touch not Dunstan with too rough a hand,
But rather against us be seen to bear.

Wulfstan. My Lord Archbishop and Lords Suffragans,
I have considered of my speech, and first
The order of the topics have set down
With notes and comments, if it please you, thus:
Exordium, with a forecast of the close:
A forecast of the close; for mark, my Lords,
An argument or abstract setting forth
In the beginning of my discourse the end,
With index to the bearings and the joints,
Shall quicken you to apprehend my drift,
And by a foreknown relevancy clench
The links and consequents, that so my speech
May, like the serpent with his tail in his mouth,
Rejoin itself, whilst in its perfect round
Its lithe articulation stands approved.

Leofwyn. We doubt not of your skill, but what in chief
Concerns us, is the matter and the drift.

Wulfstan. The dangers of division to the realm
I feelingly expose : next I commend
The golden mean,—that wisdom's triumph true
Which seeks no conquest save by wisdom's ways
And scorns to trust to fortune or to force :
Earl Athulf's dispositions shall I then
Duly develop ; him shall I disclose
As one whose courage high and humour gay
Cover a vein of caution, his true heart,
Brave though it be, not blind to danger, no,
But through imagination's optic glass
Discerning, yea and magnifying it may be,
What still he dares : him in these colours dressed
I shall set forth as prompt for enterprise
By reason of his boldness, and yet apt
For composition, owing to that vein
Of fancy which enhances, prudence which wards
Contingencies of peril : then from a scroll
Subscribed by him I read the proffered terms,
And in my oratorical conclusion
Draw my speech round to dangers of the realm
Seen in divisions, and the joys of peace.

Odo. 'Tis dexterously devised, and with our aid
Shall win the general suffrage of the Synod ;
For certain of your friends the seculars,

By secret incitation heartened up,
Will give their voices. Till the Synod meets,
Beseech you be not seen abroad. Farewell!

SCENE IV.—*A fortified causeway leading to a chapel near the Tower of London.*—THORBIORGA *is discovered leaning with her harp against a parapet in the background. The bell for vespers is ringing, and parties pass towards the chapel. Enter in front a patrol of two* Soldiers.

1st Soldier. A minstrel, is she?
2nd Soldier. By her garb, I think,
A fortune-teller.
1st Soldier. I have seen the day
When such would travel with a princely train,
Welcome to clerk and layman, thane and churl;
But they may trudge afoot and lack a meal
Now that the monks are uppermost, God wot!
2nd Soldier. Filth of the wicked! dotage of the Gentiles!
Is all they get from them. But Heida still
And Thorbiorga, though their state is fallen,
Hold up their heads. I know not but that yon
Is Thorbiorga's self. Pass on this side.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter ETHILDA *with* Attendants, *who pass on.*

Ethilda. Forward, my maidens; I will follow soon.
The sunset with a warm and ruddy light
Colours the coldness of these gloomy walls
And glances in the casements; for the day
Makes a good end. Earl Athulf's emissary
By this time should be here. I think she comes.

Enter EMMA.

Maiden, I thank you for your diligence.
Have you the gold? How light a foot is yours!
But is it the Earl's custom to be served
By women in such things?

Emma. Madam, of me
He had assurance from the Heretoch,
Who knows me from my cradle, and avouched
That I was gifted with a woman's wit
And ready with my tongue; and for my heart,
It had its own fidelity, he said,
And true to him would be if not to truth.

Ethilda. Yes, so you serve the Heretoch, not Athulf.

Emma. Earl Athulf at the Heretoch's behest;
And they are so entwined that serving one
Is serving both.

Ethilda. No, no, you serve not both;
You serve Earl Leolf only.

Emma. If it please you.
Here is the gold; with this, he said, your way

Would soon be opened to the King, whose heart
Should then be comforted and fortified,
And through his prison doors should see the light,
Expecting his deliverance.

Ethilda. His heart
Is carefuller for the Queen's than for his own:
Is nothing known of her?

Emma. Nor yet of her,
Nor of the Heretoch, had tiding reached
Earl Athulf's camp: but I had hope to meet
The sorceress Thorbiorga; by her art,
Or by forerunning of intelligence,
What happens to the Heretoch is hers
So soon as it befalls if not before.
But I have sought her fruitlessly. What's here?
I think I see her now.

Ethilda. If this be she,
Her errand is to us.

Emma. Regard her not,
For she is freest of her utterance
When least observed or importuned. Talk on.

Ethilda. I think I asked you—yes—how looked the Earl
When last you saw him?

Emma. Wasted much. His hair,
Which was not till this year so much as grizzled,
Is almost grey.

Ethilda. Earl Athulf grey?

Emma. No, no,
Earl Leolf, Madam.

Ethilda. Oh! your pardon. Well,
How looked Earl Athulf?

[THORBIORGA, *who has been advancing and touching her harp fitfully, now plays a low prelude.*

Emma. Madam, I may say
Like yonder archway, one half in the shade,
The other in the sun; for hope shines through him.

Thorbiorga (*sings*).

By sun and moon,
By fire and flood,
By well and stone,
And ashen wood,
By lot and torch,
By dreams and thunder,
Comes that above
That would be under.

Emma. She will draw nearer, if you mark her not;
She's cunning and holds off from questioning,
But she will drop you what she has to tell.

Thorbiorga (*sings again*).

By Wellesbourne and Charlcote ford,
At break of day, I saw a sword.
Wessex warriors, rank by rank,
Rose on Avon's hither bank;
Mercia's men in fair array
Looked at them from Marraway;
Close and closer ranged they soon,
And the battle joined at noon.

By Wellesbourne and Charlcote Lea
I heard a sound as of the sea :
Thirty thousand rushing men,
Twenty thousand met by ten ;
Rang the shield and brake the shaft,
Tosty yelled, Harcather laughed ;
Thorough Avon's waters red
Chased by ten the twenty fled.

By Charlcote ford and Wellesbourne
I saw the moon's pale face forlorn.
River flowed and rushes sighed,
Wounded warriors groaned and died;
Ella took his early rest,
The raven stood on his white breast ;
Hoarsely in the dead man's ear
Raven whispered "Friend, good cheer!
Ere the winter pinch the crow
He that slew thee shall lie low."

Ethilda. She cannot tell us of a victory past
But she must dash the triumph of our joy
With bodings of the future. Be it so ;
'Twixt telling and foretelling, one is sure,
The other not.

Emma. Hush ! Madam ; she can hear.

Ethilda. Well, Thorbiorga, hast thou aught to say ?

Thorbiorga. Princess, I may not tarry. To the King
Earl Leolf sends his duty, and therewith
This writing. Fare you well.

[*Exit.*

Ethilda. Stay, Thorbiorga.
She's gone ; but this shall tell us. Can you read ?

Emma (*reads*).

" *Your Highness shall know that a battle hath been fought and won. Ella the younger led Prince Edgar's power, which ran and left him on the field. I have entered into Staffordshire. Further forward I cannot, and back I will not. The Queen* (*whom God preserve!*) *is in life, but in durance: wherein she will remain till your Highness or Earl Athulf can help me. For her safety, I am assured thereof at present, holding in pawn the lives of three revolted Earls, which have fallen into my hands. For her deliverance, should I attempt it of myself, I should but put her to more hazard. Meantime fear not that aught can approach you from the West.*

" *Yours in all duty and fealty,*

" THE EARL LEOLF."

Ethilda. This, if I could but to the King convey it,
Would much sustain his spirit.

Emma. Please you, Madam,
To use the gold I brought you—it is done.

[*Trumpets sound at a distance.*

Ethilda. Hark! the patrol comes round; pass to the chapel.

SCENE V.—*A Chamber in the* Archbishop's *Palace.*

WULFSTAN THE WISE *and* SIGERIC, *the* Archbishop's *Secretary.*

Sigeric. With both these puissant Earls, as I hear say,
You have been inward.

Wulfstan. Yea, Sir, in my time;
With Athulf formerly, with Leolf always.

Sigeric. Earl Athulf is a merry man accounted.

Wulfstan. Much mirth he hath, and yet less mirth than fancy;
His is that nature of humanity
Which both ways doth redound, rejoicing now
With soarings of the soul, anon brought low:
For such the law that rules the larger spirits.
This soul of man, this elemental crasis,
Completed, should present the universe
Abounding in all kinds; and unto all
One law is common,—that their act and reach
Stretched to the farthest is resilient ever
And in resilience hath its plenary force.
Against the gust remitting fiercelier burns
The fire, than with the gust it burnt before.
The richest mirth, the richest sadness too,
Stands from a groundwork of its opposite;
For these extremes upon the way to meet

Take a wide sweep of nature, gathering in
Harvests of sundry seasons.
Sigeric. These two Earls
Are, certes, the prime spirits of the age.
Yet hardly may we either Earl esteem
A match for Dunstan. From his youth devote
To books, with chemic and mechanic art
Searching the core of things; and then caught up
To Edred's court and favour, studying there
The ways of men and policies of States,
No marvel from such training that he took
An applicable mind; and were he not
Pushed sometimes past the confine of his reason
He would o'ertop the world.
Wulfstan. Sir, could he sway
His proper passions, he were lord of all.
But he is more their captive than the King,
Poor innocent! is his.
Sigeric. When others storm
Then only is he calm. 'Twas thought at first
That when the King stood out against the terms
And would not sign, his life would pay the price.
But Dunstan went more craftily to work;
A wasting diet, with perpetual fear
And solitude, he made his ministers,
Himself desisting.
Wulfstan. His, Sir, you shall find
A spirit subdolous, though full of fire.

A spider may he best be likened to,
Which creature is an adept not alone
In workmanship of nice geometry,
But is besides a wary politician:
He, when his prey is taken in the toils,
Withholds himself until its strength be spent
With struggles, and its spirit with despair;
Then with a patient and profound delight
Forth from his ambush stalks.

Sigeric. But Dunstan's web
Is woven with a difference. He shrinks,
'Tis said, from taking life, unless inflamed
By anger, or by exigency pressed;
This softness hath he still.

Enter EMMA.

Emma. Why halt you here?
The doors are opened to the ante-room,
It will be crowded soon; I pray you, come.
Earl Sidroc, in a Notary's apparel,
Will follow you, and waits you here without.

Sigeric. You have the Archbishop's pass?

Wulfstan. Yes, here it is.

Emma. I can pass too; I have cajoled with smiles
The High Gerefa's man that keeps the door.
How tardy old friends are; how prompt are new!
Taken in the flower and freshness of good-will

My friend of yesterday will run his ears
Into some risk to please me. On my back
He'll put a surplice, and amongst the choir
I sing the psalm. But linger not, I pray.

Sigeric. The passage to the left—I think you know it.
Come, I will show you.

Emma. I beseech you, Sir,
When you address the Synod, wander not;
Be mindful of the purpose.

Wulfstan. Yes, my child;
I'll sit the purpose close. Truly a light
That shines not in its place is worse than none;
And when the thought is prized above the purpose,
'Tis Jack o' the Lanthorn speaks. Oh, Sir, your pardon!

SCENE VI.—*A Chamber in the Tower.*

Dunstan (*alone*). If miracles were wrought in the olden time
More needful are they now. 'Tis He! 'tis He!
'Tis God that speaks; His will, His word, His voice.
But erring men, because their eyes behold
The channel, undiscerning of the source,
Misdeem His voice for mine. Through sight they err;
Through seeing what is fleshly they are deaf
In spirit, nor can know the voice of God.
Oh, that the grace were given me to tear off

These mummeries and maskings of the flesh,
That so their souls, delivered and discharged
From vain bewilderments of sense, redeemed
From human 'scapes and diabolic wiles,
Should know 'tis verily God's voice they hear!
Then what if in the Synod . . . what if there . . .

Enter OSWALD, *Bishop of Worcester, and* ETHELWALD, *Bishop of Winchester.*

Whom have we now? So, so! what cheer, my Lords?
Or, let me say, what tiding? For our cheer,
If God be gracious to us, flies not round
With every gust.

Oswald. The Synod is assembling
With seculars commixed. We hear that still
Earl Athulf hangs at Tonbridge; but his force
Daily increaseth. It is good we go.
This hour we meet the Synod in good heart,
What cometh with the next we know not.

Dunstan. Nay,
Who trusteth knoweth. To the Synod then;
But let us be expected for a season
Before we show ourselves.

SCENE VII.—*An Entrance Hall opening into a Gallery which leads to the Synodal Chamber.—It is filled with* Monks, Guards, *and* Attendants. *Two of the* Gerefa's *or* High Sheriff's *Deputies are in front.* Ecclesiastics *of rank, including two or three* Abbesses, *pass through more and more frequently as the scene proceeds, not unmixed with* Civil *and* Military Functionaries. *Each* Ecclesiastic *is attended by an* Acolyte *as a train-bearer.*

1st Deputy. Here they come. What! a secular! Well, he must pass, though he shall not be welcome.

2nd Deputy. There are more than he.

1st Deputy. They are stricken deer; I would not come amongst the herd if I were they.

2nd Deputy. I never saw Dunstan's chair before. 'Tis a choice piece of workmanship.

1st Deputy. He made it himself, and they say if another were to sit in it, it would toss him in the air. He can make anything, and make it do his bidding.

2nd Deputy. But should his chair be set above the Archbishop's?

1st Deputy. It was so ordered, and indeed he that is above the King is more than one step above the Archbishop. King, said I! Who knows whether there be a King, or in which brother's reign we that are living live?

2nd Deputy. Hush! Speak not so.

1st Deputy. Nay, 'tis the way of the beehive, and courts are no better. Make way, Sirs, if it please you. No offence. Sirs, 'tis my office. Farther back, I pray.

2nd Deputy. Here's Godredud.

1st Deputy. I say ye shall make room;
What though he be a secular? he's noble
And of a generous life.

A Monk. Six meals a day,
With morat and spiced ale, is generous living.
Also the gout he hath is generous.

Another Monk. Bed, board, nor bath, he never yet forewent
The joys of for a day. Look at his tonsure;
A well-grown acorn's cup would cover it.

Enter amongst others, WULFSTAN THE WISE, *habited as an Ecclesiastic, and* SIDROC *in the dress of a Notary.*

Sidroc (*aside to Wulfstan*). Let us stand here, and reckon as they pass
The numbers on each side.

Enter EMMA *in a surplice, with a band of* Choristers.

Emma (*aside to the 1st Deputy*). Aha! my friend,
Know'st thou the merry wench?

1st Deputy. Nay, softly; hush!

But pass no further yet; here you shall stand,
And I will tell you, as they come, who's who.
The first of men! the Angels of the Church!
I know them all, and most of them . . . Room, ho!
The Abbot of St. Winifred's—Room, room!
And most of them I call my friends.
Sidroc (*aside to Wulfstan*). The newt
Lived much amongst the tadpoles, and averred
He was acquainted with all kinds of fish.
1*st Deputy*. Here is the Abbot Morcar with one hand.
A woman kissed the other, for which cause
He chopped it off. He emulates St. Arnulph,
And wears a shirt of hedgehog skins. No need
To clear the way for him.
Emma. Sirs, push me not.
No, they fall back unbidden.
1*st Deputy*. And here is Monn,
The Abbot of St. Clive's, that heals the sick
And makes the dumb to speak. From far and near
Thousands and thousands make resort to him,
And them that may not for infirmity
He goes to; or if so be he cannot go,
He sends his walking-stick, which does as well.
Emma. See how they press around him.
1*st Deputy*. Room, I say,
Place for the Abbot of St. Clive's!—Lo, there
Cumba, the Priest of Sherborne; more than twice
Has he changed sides; but he's so mild and sweet

That there are ever some to hold him up.
Betwixt the monks and secular Church half-way
Stands Cumba, smiling upon both.
Sidroc (*aside*). A chicken
Is good for breakfast, and an egg is good;
But something half-way 'twixt an egg and chicken
Is very vilely bad.
1st Deputy. And truth to say,
His faith is mounted on his charity
And sits it easy.
Sidroc (*aside*). Cumba is my gauge,
And by the crown of his head I know the times.
Grow they ascetic, then his tonsure widens;
Or free, it narrows in.
Emma. What man is this,
[*Pointing to* WULFSTAN.
With large round silvery head and fair round face
And those lost eyes so lustrous that see nothing?
Tell me what man is he.
1st Deputy. Some country priest;
A man one sees and makes no mention of;
He had his pass or I had questioned him,
For with my will a priest so meanly clad
And slovenly, should take his rags elsewhere.
Sidroc (*aside*). Dogs take distinctions, learning from mankind
A worldly lesson, and the beggar's stayed
When lace and gawds go free.—What say you, Sir?

1st Deputy. To you, Sir? nothing.

[*A cry without of* "Place for the Archbishop." *A flourish of trumpets, and enter divers* Officers *of the* Archbishop's *household in procession. Then the* Archbishop, *attired in splendid vestments and preceded by* SIGERIC *and* BRIDFERTH *bearing his mass-book and crucifix. He is supported on the right by the* Bishop of Lincoln, *on the left by the* Bishop of Lichfield, *and followed by a long train of* Officers *and* Attendants.

Odo (*returning the obeisances with which he is received as he passes through*). The blessing of God's peace, my sons, be on you;
And I beseech you, pray that by God's grace
Our counsels may be prospered to His glory.

[*Passes with his train into the Gallery.*

1st Monk. The Primate is too ancient for the times;
He is too sudden when he's choleric,
Too slow when he's at ease.

2nd Monk. He's shaken both ways.

A Thane. The Primate looks an inch or two less tall
Than he was wont, methinks; nor is his step
So firm as once it was.

An Acolyte. Time, Sir, and care.

Sidroc (*aside*). Or peradventure sin and fear.—Good father,
Saw you my Lord the Archbishop pass?

Wulfstan. My son?

Sidroc. Saw you my Lord the Primate?

Wulfstan. Yes, my son.

Was it not he that passed in gold and purple?

Sidroc. The same. We wait but for the Abbot now.

Wulfstan. The Abbot?

Sidroc. Dunstan. He is first and last.

Methinks the muster of the seculars
Is stronger than was looked for. What is this?
Hark! Hist! A hum as of a multitude
Without the gates. Permit me, Sirs. He comes.

Enter DUNSTAN *solus, clad in sackcloth, with ashes on his head and a missal in his hand. The foremost of the crowd fall upon their knees and bow their heads as he approaches.*

Dunstan. Fear ye and tremble, ye that love the Church,
For wolves are round about her. Watch and pray.
[*Passes into the Gallery.*

Sidroc. Pass on, pass on; the benches will be thronged.
Stick close to me, good father. God ha' mercy!
Sir, I beseech you to remit your elbow.

1st Deputy. Keep order, constables! what a fray is here!

Sidroc. Could we but pass this friar, all were won.

St. Hilda! what a mountain of a friar!
Sir, pray you die and do the Church some service;
You'd choke the way to Hell.—Now is the time;
Come, father, come; stick close to me; here, here.
Knock down that chorister. I thank you, Sir.

SCENE VIII.—*The Synodal Chamber.—The first only of those who passed from the Hall into the Gallery in the preceding scene are present at the opening of this. At the further end, within a silver rail, is the Shrine of St. Austin, with its cross. At the hither end, near the door, are the* High Gerefa *and the* Doorkeeper.

Gerefa. So—bar the door; all those we want we have,
And more.
Doorkeeper. The gallery without is full,
And none are there but have the Archbishop's pass.
Gerefa. Too many have it. Bar the doors. What's this?
The precinct of St. Austin's Shrine is dark.
It should be lighted.
Doorkeeper. Yea, Sir, and it was.
Gerefa. And who put out the lights?
Doorkeeper. I know not that.
Gerefa. Well; bar the doors.
Doorkeeper. I cannot for this friar.
Gerefa. Then let him pass.

Doorkeeper. 'Twill scarce be he alone.

[*The* Friar *enters, and is followed by* SIDROC, WULFSTAN, *and others.*

Gerefa. What, more and more! I tell thee, shut them out.

[*The doors are closed.*

Now, let us all with all our best of breath
Shout, "Silence!"

[*Shouts of* "Silence!"

In the name and by the power
Of holiest Mother Church, I here declare
This Synod opened. The Archbishop speaks.

Odo. Friends, brethren, helpmates, councillors in Christ!

The dangers and divisions of the Church
Have called you hither. Be ye all as one.
For though the letter of citation saith
"*Semotis Laicis*," yet to one end
Are we assembled all,—concord and peace,
And whosoever hath God's peace at heart,
Him we rejoice to meet.
Since last I saw you here, that virtuous King,
The godly Edred, hath been hence translated,
And Edwin hath succeeded, who is young.
King Edwin, Sirs, descended of a house
Illustrious no less for piety
Than earthly honours, could not but abound,
At first and by the fashioning of nature,

In Christian graces: but, Sirs, being young,
He, through the easiness of youth betrayed
To bad advice and making haste to err,
Did what was not convenient in a King.
For first from many a monastery, sown
Throughout the land in Edred's bounteous reign,
With violence and with force of arms he drave
Our Benedictine brethren—not alone
Them that were placed by Edred in the shoes
Of seculars that by Edred were expulsed,
But ancient men that had been there aforetime.
And next, Sirs, which is chiefly what concerns
Our present meeting,—next, Sirs, did he marry;
And whom, Sirs, did he marry? One like himself,
Though doubtless graced with many virtues, young
And erring, and in nothing more astray
Than in this marriage; being, as they are,
Cousins in the second degree and undispensed.
This marriage, Sirs, contracted by surprise,
Was scandalous, as ye know, to all good men
And grievous to the Church; and weighing well
What evil fruit to these and after times
Might of its hasty consummation grow,
We deem'd it best that this unbedded bride
Should visit Chester, there to live recluse
Until the assembled Church of what had chanced
Were advertised. 'Tis therefore ye are here.
Councillors in Christ, the cause ye meet to judge

Is, briefly, shall this marriage stand or no?

Sidroc (*aside to Wulfstan*). Stop; Cumba fumbles with the folds of his alb;
I think he'll speak; withhold yourself awhile.

Odo. Sirs, I await your censures. For myself
I humbly seek instruction, which till I glean
From worthier men, my judgment shall be dumb.

Cumba. Most holy fathers and my brethren all!
To most of you 'tis known that from my youth
I have revered the regulars; excellent men,
Whom though to imitate had been in me
Alas! a vain endeavour, yet to praise
Has been my constant care. Sirs, of this praise
And of this reverence and constant care
I will not bate a jot; for what I was
At first, I am, and will be evermore.
But to the end unchangeable, the ways
Are various as the paths upon the sea;
And though 'tis by the stars the vessel steers,
Yet lies she with the wind. The choice of ways
That opens to you now, doth split itself
Into two opposites—the ways of war,
The ways of peace; and who betwixt the twain
Shall stand with dubious or divided heart?
When has the Church been prosperous but in peace?
What multiplies the monasteries? Peace.
What breeds endowments, treasures, and demesnes?
Why, peace. Then shall we not consult for peace?

But if we void this marriage, peace is flown;
War that ev'n now stands knocking at the gate
Must then be bid come in; nor present blows
Shall arbitrate an end, but years unborn
May in the issue of this marriage see
A hand, a sword, a claimant of the crown,
A cause of strife. I grant the marriage rash;
But out of common life this lesson cull:
A marriage unadvisedly contracted
By a hot stripling, in the parent's heart
Kindles a flame at first; but useless ire
Is transient with the wise; for were it not,
Age should in anger more exorbitate
Than youth in love. The parent pacified
Binds by a frank forgiveness to himself
In bonds of gratitude his erring son:
And even as he his son, I deem the Church
With reconciling and reclaiming love
Shall conquer back the King. My humble voice,
Bending to better judgments, thus concludes.

Morcar. O thou dead fly that spoilest the pot! O grub!
O maggot gendered in a serpent's slime!
God spat thee out for being neither hot nor cold,
Thou Mammon's friend, and Lucifer licked thee up.
Woe to thee, Judas! Art thou not accursed?
Thou dippest with us in the dish, but lo!
Thou has betrayed us for a piece of money!
O shame! O sin! O havoc to the Church!

The Devil shall hang thee up to dry, thou rag!
For thou art soaked and saturate with sin.
Odo. Forbear him, brother.
Morcar. O thou filthy rag!
Odo. I say, forbear him.
Godredud. Brother, art thou mad?
He is no traitor, but a faithful priest.
Why dost thou rail upon him thus!
Odo. Forbear!
Morcar. Cry out and cease not! saith the voice I hear—
Search out the sleights of Bel and slay the Dragon;
And who saith, Cease, be dumb!
Odo. I say it, brother;
Yea, I command thee, cease. Our brother Monn
Is wishful to be heard; speak, brother Monn.
Monn. My loving friends and brethren, we are met
Upon this marriage, not to speak our own
But to declare God's judgments, never yet
Made manifest by such apparent signs,
Such prodigies and portents. Think, oh, think
Upon the darkness of that marriage day!
Throughout the land a dismal horror spread;
In Essex it rained blood; at Evesham
An image of the Virgin, as ye know,
Was seen to weep and sweat and lift its hands
And roll its eyes; at Selsey and at Wells
The vault of heaven was fill'd with falling stars,

And fiery serpents weltered in the skies.
Have we forgotten that these things befel,
Or know we not their import? Then, alas!
Are we more careless of the cause of God
Than Gallio, more blind than Elymas.
But if we bear in mind that such things were,
We must not, dare not, judge what God hath judged.
Godredud. The worthy Abbot, by my faith, my Lords,
Doth excellently well to bid us weigh
These miracles and signs. They signified,
Doubtless, some untoward events, my Lords;
But what those untoward events should be
Behoves us not too rashly to deliver;
Divisions in the realm, it may be, war,
Implacable revenge and hatred dire
And wrath which wills not that its wounds be healed.
The birthday of a progeny like this
Would doubtless teem with warnings, which to blink
Or read awry should work us infinite woe.
But to those premonitions further signs
Constructive and illustrative succeed;
And now two armies in the south and west
Auspiciously afoot, give countenance
To Edwin's cause as favoured from above,
And warn us, if fair terms of composition
Be offered, not to spurn them.
Sidroc (*aside to Wulfstan*). Now, now, now;
Stand up and speak—produce them.

Wulfstan. Here they are,
Most noble Godredud; here are the terms:
"I, Athulf, Earl, intent on sparing life,
But purposing to lodge on Ludgate Hill
At latest in three days, to all concerned
Send greeting and say thus: All regulars,
Since Edred's death supplanted, may return,
Save those who did themselves, in Edred's reign,
Supplant in benefices duly holden
The secular incumbents; the new Queen
Shall be received, and so soon as the Pope
Shall grant his dispensation, shall be crowned:
Which yielded, no man in his life or goods
Shall answer for the past."—My Lords and friends,
These are the terms I bring you from Earl Athulf,
And I am Wulfstan.

[*Acclamations from the Secular party, mingled with shouts of rage and execrations from the other.*

Brethren, hear me speak;
Brethren and friends, I fain would speak to you;
My friends and brethren, hear me, I beseech you.

Odo. My sons, this passion and this noise I hold
Unworthy this assembly. Hear him speak,
For he was never factious nor inflamed
Against us, and 'tis just that he be heard.

[*Acclamations from the* Seculars.

Wulfstan. I am not factious, brethren, nor inflamed,
For my abode was always, so to say,

On Mount Olympus——

Monn. Fie upon thee, Pagan!
Oh, but I know thee and thy place full well.

Wulfstan. On Mount Olympus with the Muses nine
I ever dwelt . . .

Monks. He doth confess it! Lo!
He doth confess it! Faggots and a stake!
He is a Heathen—shall a Heathen speak?

Morcar. I hear a voice that saith, "Make lime of his bones."

Sidroc. Sirs, ye mistake him; he is a pious priest,
And what he means to say is merely this:
Against your orders and your monasteries
He speaks not; but he deems that holiest men,
If they would flourish in this warlike world,
Must feed within a fence of secular swords;
And better were it for you to engulf
But half the kingdom's treasure, so begirt,
Than to be left defenceless with the whole,
And thus be fattened but to feed the Dane.
He bids you know that in this land this day
He finds more fat than bones, more monks than men:
He bids you to the seaboard look, where now
A fleet of Northmen, fifty-six tall ships,
Hang in St. George's Channel, waiting there
Till half the land shall cut each other's throats
And leave the other half a spoil to them.
Bethink you, then; escape ye hardly may

From the two puissant and prudent Earls,
Athulf and Leolf; but this granted you,
Ye do but fall a weak and present prey
To Sweyne and Olaf; wherefore make your choice
And thrive in peace or brave a twofold ruin.

Priest. Well said!

Monk. Who's this?

Another. A lambskin man he is;
A fellow that puts his legs in lambskin hose.

Morcar. The Lord shall smite him with the botch of Egypt.

Several Secular priests (*joined by some of the Monks, amidst clamour and confusion*). We will have peace; we are not men of blood;
Are we not Christians all? The Dane—the Dane!
Are we not servants of the Prince of Peace?
The Northmen are upon us—Olaf and Sweyne!

[DUNSTAN *throws himself on his knees and bows his head to the ground.*

Sidroc (*aside to Wulfstan*). He bends before the storm.

Wulfstan. Will he not speak?

Sidroc. I know not—yes—he is in act to hatch
A brood of pestilent words; yea, is he not?
He stirs, he moves—few moments are enough.

Wulfstan. They say a louse that's but three minutes old
May be a grandsire; with no less a speed
Do foul thoughts gender.

Sidroc. Ha! we'll see anon—
Faith of my body! up he goes—sit—sit.
Dunstan (*rising slowly*). I groan in spirit. Brethren, seek not in me
Support or counsel. The whole head is sick,
The whole heart faint, and trouble and rebuke
Come round about me, thrusting at my soul.
But, brethren, if long years of penance sore,
For your sake suffered, be remembered now,
Deem me not utterly of God forsaken,
Deem not yourselves forsaken; lift up your hearts;
See where ye stand on earth; see how in heaven
Ye are regarded. Ye are the sons of God,
The order of Melchisedeck, the law,
The visible structure of the world of spirit,
Which was, and is, and must be; all things else
Are casual, and monarchs come and go,
And warriors for a season walk the earth,
By accident; for these are accidental,
But ye eternal; ye are the soul of the world,
Ye are the course of nature consecrate,
Ye are the Church; one spirit is throughout you,
And Christendom is with you in all lands.
Who comes against you? 'Scaped from Hell's confine
A wandering rebel, fleeting past the sun,
Darkens the visage of the spouse of Christ.
But 'tis but for a moment; he consumed
Shall vanish like a vapour, she divulged

Break out in glory that transcends herself.
The thrones and principalities of earth,
When stood they that they stood not with the aid
Of us and them before us? Azarias,
Azias, Amaziah, Saul himself,
Fell they not headlong when they fell from us?
And Oza, he that did but touch the ark?
Oh, then, what sin for me, what sin for you,
For me victorious in a thousand fights
Against this foe, for you as oft redeemed,
That now we falter! Do we falter? No!
Thou God that art within me when I conquer,
I feel Thee fill me now! Angelic host,
Seraphs that wave your swords about my head,
I thank you for your succours! Who art thou
That givest me this gracious admonition?
Alas! forgive me that I knew thee not,
O, Gabriel! I do as thou command'st;
All earthly counsels I renounce, abjure,
And utterly abhor. I ask of God,
Is it His will that this His chosen Church
Shall ratify these nuptials? Hark! oh, hark!
Nay, heard ye not a voice? Oh, Earth, be still!
Again and louder—*Absit hoc ut fiat!*

A voice from the precinct of St. Austin's Shrine.

ABSIT HOC UT FIAT!

Dunstan. Wondrous word!
Oh, precious guidance! Oh, ineffable grace!

That dost from disobedience deliver
The hearts of even the faithless! We obey,
And these espousals do we now declare
Avoided and accursed; the woman espoused,
By name Elgiva, from the man called Edwin
We separate, and from the Church's pale
We cast her forth, and with her we cast forth
Those three that have been foremost to uphold her,
Earl Athulf and Earl Leolf and Earl Sidroc.
Them we proclaim, by sentence of the Pope,
From Christian rites and ministries cut off,
And from the holy Brotherhood of the Just
Sequestered with a curse. Be they accursed!
Accursed be they in all time and place,
Accursed be they in the camp and mart,
Accursed be they in the city and field,
Accursed be their flying and abiding,
Accursed be their waking and their rest—
We curse the hand that feeds them when they hunger,
We curse the arm that props them when they faint;
Withered and blasted be that hand and arm!
We curse the tongue that speaks to them, the ear
That hears them, though it be but unawares:
Blistered and cankered be that tongue and ear!
The earth in which their bodies shall be buried
We curse, except it cast their bodies out;
We shut the gates of Heaven against their souls,
And as this candle that I fling to the ground,

So be their light extinguished in the Pit!

Morcar and other Monks. Amen! So be it! Be it so! Amen!

Sidroc (*aside to Wulfstan*). The day is lost—away—skip—scud—begone.

SIDROC *and* WULFSTAN, *with others of the Secular party, retire amidst the shouts and execrations of the* Regulars.

Dunstan. Publish the miracle without the gates;
Declare the sentence of the Pope.

Odo. Fly hence,
Ye that are Secular! They will rouse the people;
There will be violence and blood; fly hence.
This council is dismissed. The grace of God
Be with you all! This Synod is dissolved.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Tonbridge Castle.*

ATHULF *and* GRIMBALD.

Athulf. There—take my truncheon—thou couldst rule my force
With more acceptance in the general mind
Than I. By Heaven, I am ashamed to see
Such bickerings in a camp! Give me a cowl
And let me rule a monastery rather.

Grimbald. There—take my cap and bells—I'll rule your force,
And wisely too; but when I look for love
In change for wisdom from the multitude,
Give me again my good old cap and bells.

Athulf. Ah, fool, you're right—and that man is not wise
That cannot bear to be accounted foolish.
I must be patient. Yet it frets my heart,
Amongst my many cares, to be reviled
By shallow coxcombs whom I daily save,
Rescue, redeem, snatch from a rubbishy tomb
Amongst the ruins of their wits, pulled down
By their own hands upon their heads, God help them!

Well, I'll be patient. Fetch me the muster-roll.

[*Exit* GRIMBALD.

'Tis ill to bear, though.

Enter SIDROC *and* WULFSTAN THE WISE.

Ha! my friends! in this
At least has fortune favoured me. I feared
The tidings of our misadventurous Synod
Augured but ill for both of you. Well met!
Bonfires shall blaze for this. What! 'twas your heels,
I think, that brought you hither?

Sidroc. For myself,
When I am frightened I can run with wings,
Fast as an ostrich; but preserve me, Heaven!
From flying with Philosophy in hand!

Athulf. What! was our philosophic friend so slow?

Sidroc. When I am flying for my life henceforth
Welcome be any ordinary load—
Anchises on my back, if so ye will;
But spare me, Athulf, if you love your friend,
From bringing Wisdom with me.

Wulfstan. Well, my Lords,
I will not cumber you again. Farewell!
I will return——

Sidroc. To Mount Olympus?

Wulfstan. Yes.
To such a sanctuary as that was once.

So tranquil were the elements there, 'tis said
That letters by the finger of the priest
Writ in the ashes of the sacrifice
Remained throughout the seasons uneffaced.
And Oxford now has academic bowers
Sacred to many a Muse, where such as I
May write, though in a rough, tempestuous age,
What Time shall spare. Thither, my Lords, I'll go,
And there I'll chronicle your deeds. Farewell.

Athulf. Farewell, good Wulfstan; and I speak the word
With reverence and love; for gifts like yours
Are all unworthy to be wasted here.
But take this with you,—wild and unreclaimed
As doubtless must appear to yours my wit,
Yet you have scattered in that wilderness
Some seeds that will not perish. Fare you well.

Wulfstan. My Lord, your kindness which doth cause these drops
Will pardon them.

Athulf. God keep you in His peace!
If good betide us, it will bring you joy;
If evil, you are not so chilled by age,
But that you'll mourn.

Wulfstan. Long, long, my Lord, if long
I live to mourn,—which may not be! 'Tis true
The sharpness of our pangs is less in age,
As sounds are muffled by the falling snow;
But true no less, that what age faintly feels

It flings not off. I'll pray for your success.

[*Exit.*

Athulf. The miracle of the time is that old man
And kind as wise—mine own eyes, too, are moist—
Yet he'll forget us ere the sun go down.

Sidroc. Then I beseech you to forget him now
And tell me of your counsels and intents.

Athulf. Thus do I stand: My letters from the north
Advise me that the Queen's impatient heart
Brooks not prolonged captivity, and burns
To jeopardize herself, and with herself,
Leolf and all his power, in rash attempts
At premature escape. Meanwhile the Dane
Lurks in the Irish Sea, till civil strife,
The needfullest resources draining last,
Disarms the seaboard, and as well may hap
Disables us within. My army here
Frets at the Pope's anathema, and some,
Whose ears are open-doored to phantoms, swear
When they would sleep o' nights they hear the voice
That was, they're pleased to say, ne'er born of man,
And scared the Synod.

Sidroc. Save me, Heaven, from dupes;
Leave me to deal with Devils as I may.
My life upon it, 'twas a thing contrived—
The voice, I'll warrant, of some deep-mouthed monk
That skulked behind the cross.

Athulf. This pause, besides,

Disheartens them, and lo! a laggard I,
That lingers on the road for lack of heart.
There is a fortitude in standing still
Which leaders know, but they that follow, never.
Daily I hear ten thousand tongues cry out
"Forward to London," and I stir not. Still
I must not stand upon this strength too long,
And truth to say, the levies that come now
Are scarcely worth the waiting for. That ban
Dispersed them on their way. All which revolved
I meditate to make a sudden march,
And seize the Tower by night.

Sidroc. I am with you there.
The more, that we have friends within the walls.
That wily wench who carried in your letters
Remains behind, and unsuspected still.

Athulf. Moreover, she hath with her store of gold;
And some there be keep watch and ward whose thirst
Gapes wide for golden showers.

Sidroc. So frail are they!
Now, would you know the thirst that masters me,
Bethink you of the dust of sixty miles
Swallowed since sunrise with no drop to drink.

Athulf. Ah! God forgive me! To the buttery, come.

SCENE II.—*London. An Apartment in the Tower.*

DUNSTAN *and* GURMO.

Dunstan. Whence com'st thou? From the King? Is he awake?

Gurmo. He is.

Dunstan. How slept he? Soundly through the night?

Gurmo. He did.

Dunstan. Why how? Did not the dogs then bark?

Gurmo. Yes; he slept still.

Dunstan. The watches of the night
Are changed too seldom. Once an hour henceforth
Let them be changed, and ever as they change
Let drums and trumpets sound.

Gurmo. Her Majesty
Has waited long. Likewise the Primate.

Dunstan. Whew!
I had forgotten them. Conduct them hither.

[*Exit* GURMO.

The fear, but not the fact, of death . . . if this,
This only should suffice,—why, then, my soul
Should find a free deliverance to the work,
And after hold its state more cheerfully.
If not, the darkness of the mortal deed
Shall yet be kindled by a light divine.

Enter the QUEEN MOTHER *and* ODO.

Content you, Madam. Let me hear no more.
You have another and a better son;
Though this should not deserve to reign nor live,—
As he is truly dead in his offence
Already, yea, and stinketh,—yet should that
Applausively succeed. I say no more;
But leave to me the working out God's will
Touching them both.

Queen Mother. My Lord, your very self
Was witness of his hardihood and spite,
And how most filthily by word of mouth
He spat upon me, so to say, and railed
Foully with evil speaking from his heart,
Renouncing and disowning me for aye,
Likewise the ten commandments. Yet, my Lord,
He is my son—this womb did bring him forth—
You know not what it is to be a mother;
I do beseech you, spare him!

Dunstan. To what end?
For God's behoof, or yours, or his, or whose?

Queen Mother. Speak, my Lord Primate; bid him to spare my son.

Dunstan. Who biddeth me?

Odo. Lord Abbot, by mine office
I might be bold to speak by way of bidding;
Yet still remembering thine unrivalled merits

And services to God, I say but this:
The times are evil; accidents may come
Yielding occasion of exceeding malice
With havoc to the Church and injury
And backward sliding, if beyond the range
Of Christian prudence, through inordinate zeal,
We push our present promise of success.
For of one colour though the city be,
And neighbouring shires the same, still is the land,
Eastward and northward specially, a web
Diversely diapered; for here the weft
Is spun of light and dipped in dyes of heaven;
There, dyed in Styx and spun of Satan's slaver.
We may not think that Athulf, who is held
To number twenty thousand, will be scared
By caps of citizens tossed up i' the air;
Nor may we count upon the citizens' caps
For courses which may seem to some extreme.
Wherefore behoves us so to use success
As not to raise against us those, though erring,
Whose honest zeal stands stoutly for the crown,
Demanding strict succession.

Dunstan. Be content.
Though neither law nor usage of the realm
Did ever yet demand what these demand,
Nor ever yet did honesty so err,
Still have I pondered all. The godless King
Shall abdicate; he shall not be removed.

Odo. If reason should so work with him at length
That such should be his choice, 'twere excellent.

Dunstan. Since he was crowned, experience, by my hand
Directed, hath admonished him to deem
The state of Kings unenviable. Now
He shall be tutored to perceive the joys
Of privateness, best fitted for his years.
I pray you meddle not. Nor, Madam, you.
And when we meet again some three days hence,
'Twill be in Edgar's reign, whom God preserve!

SCENE III.—*A Precinct of the Tower.*

ETHILDA *and* EMMA.

Ethilda. They will not; for they say that I am watched,
And to find entrance to the King for me
Should bring a double danger; but for you
They would attempt it. At the hour of none
The Abbot will be with him, after which
You will have least to fear.

Emma. Unless a ghost
Stand in the doorway, terror is there none
Can turn me backward.

Ethilda. Is your father safe?

Emma. Fled with Earl Sidroc. We shall meet ere night.

SCENE IV.—*A Chamber in the Tower.*

DUNSTAN *and* EDWIN.

Dunstan. How does your Grace?

Edwin. What need for you to ask?
Let me remind you of an antique verse:

> What sent the messengers to hell
> Was asking what they knew full well.

You know that I am ill and very weak.

Dunstan. You do not answer with a weakened wit.
Is there offence in this my visitation?
If so, I leave you.

Edwin. Yes, there is offence.
And yet I would not you should go. Offence
Is better than this blank of solitude.
I am so weary of no company,
That I could almost welcome to these walls
The Devil and his Angels. You may stay.

Dunstan. What makes you weak? Do you not like your food,
Or have you not enough?

Edwin. Enough is brought;
But he that brings it drops what seems to say
That it is mixed with poison—some slow drug;
So that I scarce dare eat and hunger always.

Dunstan. Your food is poisoned by your own suspicions.
'Tis your own fault. Though Gurmo's zeal is great,
It is impossible he should so exceed
As to put poison in your food,—I think.
But thus it is with Kings; suspicions haunt
And dangers press around them all their days;
Ambition galls them, luxury corrupts,
And wars and treasons are their talk at table.

Edwin. This homily you should read to prosperous Kings;
It is not needed for a King like me.

Dunstan. Who shall read homilies to a prosperous King!
'Twas not long since that thou didst seem to prosper,
And then I warned thee; and with what event
Thou knowest; for thy heart was high in pride.
A hope that, like Salome, danced before thee
Did ask my head. But I reproach thee not.
Much rather would I, seeing thee abased,
Lift up thy mind to wisdom.

Edwin. Heretofore
It was not in my thoughts to take thy head;
But should I reign again . . . Come, then, this wisdom
That thou wouldst teach me; harmless as the dove

I have been whilom; let me now, though late,
Learn from the serpent.

Dunstan. To thy credulous ears
The world, or what is to a King the world,
The triflers of thy Court, have imaged me
As cruel and insensible to joy,
Austere and ignorant of all delights
That arts can minister. Far from the truth
They wander who say thus. I but denounce
Loves on a throne and pleasures out of place.
I am not old; not twenty years have fled
Since I was young as thou; and in my youth
I was not by those pleasures unapproached
Which youth converses with.

Edwin. No! wast thou not?
How came they in thy sight?

Dunstan. When Satan first
Attempted me, 'twas in a woman's shape;
Such shape as may have erst misled mankind
When Greece or Rome upreared with Pagan rites
Temples to Venus, pictured there or carved
With rounded, polished, and exuberant grace,
And mien whose dimpled changefulness betrayed
Through jocund hues the seriousness of passion.
I was attempted thus, and Satan sang
With female pipe and melodies that thrilled
The softened soul, of mild voluptuous ease
And tender sports that chased the kindling hours

In odorous gardens or on terraces
To music of the fountains and the birds,
Or else in skirting groves by sunshine smitten
Or warm winds kissed, whilst we from shine to shade
Roved unregarded. Yes, 'twas Satan sang,
Because 'twas sung to me, whom God had called
To other pastime and severer joys.
But were it not for this, God's strict behest
Enjoined upon me,—had I not been vowed
To holiest service rigorously required,
I should have owned it for an Angel's voice,
Nor ever could an earthly crown, or toys
And childishness of vain ambition, gauds
And tinsels of the world, have lured my heart
Into the tangle of those mortal cares
That gather round a throne. What call is thine
From God or man, what voice within bids thee
Such pleasures to forego, such cares confront?

Edwin. What voice? My kingdom's voice—my people's cry,
Whom ye devour—the wail of shepherds true
Over their flocks, those godly, kindly priests
That love my people and love me withal—
Their voice requires me, and the voice of Kings
Who died with honour and who live in me,
The voice of Egbert, Ethelbert, and Alfred.
What wouldst thou more? the voice of Kings unborn
To whom my sceptre and my blood descends—

A thousand voices call me.

Dunstan. Sir, not so;
The voicesof this people and those Kings
Call on Prince Edgar, not on thee, to reign.
There is a voice calls thee, but not to reign,
The voice of her thou fain wouldst take to wife;
An excommunicated wretch she is
Ev'n now, and if thy lust of kingly power
Outbid thine other lusts, and starken thee
In grasping of that shadow of a sceptre
That still is left thee, 'tis a dying voice.
For know—unless thou by an instant act
Renounce the crown, Elgiva shall not live.
The deed is ready, to which thy name affixed
Discharges from restraint both her and thee.
Say wilt thou sign?

Edwin. I will not.

Dunstan. Be advised.
What hast thou to surrender? I look round;
This chamber is thy palace, court, and realm.
I do not see the crown. Where is it hidden?
Is that thy throne? why, 'tis a base joint-stool;
Or this thy sceptre? 'tis an ashen stick
Notched with the days of thy captivity.
Such royalties to abdicate, methinks,
Should hardly hold thee long; nay, I myself,
That love not ladies greatly, would give these
To ransom whom I loved.

Edwin. If all I have
Be nothing worth, why ask'st thou me to give it?
I trust thee not. I deem myself a King.
But let me go at large, and knowing then
How stands my realm, what's lost and what remains,
I'll answer thee.

Dunstan. Now, now, I bid thee answer.
Anon I bring the parchment that redeems
Another and thyself, from durance both,
And one from worse. I bid thee be prepared.

[*Exit.*

Edwin. Elgiva! for thy ransom, life were little,
A kingdom in itself of no account.
But oh! an abject and unkingly act
Done by a King, and, as his foes will say,
To save himself in his extremity,—
This is a purchase thou thyself wilt scorn,
Although thyself the rescued. Yet, oh! yet . . .
What step is this?

Enter EMMA.

Emma. My Lord, the Abbot comes,
And I am here at peril of my life . . .
This from Earl Leolf . . . it says the Queen is safe . . .
No more or I am lost . . . Earl Athulf . . . nay . . .

[*Exit.*

Edwin. Farewell, then, loved Elgiva! I shall die,

As now I may, with honour from mankind,
And no one in thine ear shall dare to breathe
A defamation of my kingly name.
They shall not say but that I died a King,
And like a King in my regalities.

Re-enter DUNSTAN (*holding a scroll*).

Dunstan. Thy signature to this.
Edwin. I will not sign.
Dunstan. Thou wilt not! Wilt thou that thy mistress die?
Edwin. Insulting Abbot! she is not my mistress;
She is my wife, my Queen.
Dunstan. Predestinate pair!
He knoweth who is the searcher of our hearts
That I was ever backward to take life
Albeit at His command. Still have I striven
To put aside that service, seeking still
All ways and shifts that wit of man could scheme
To spare the cutting off your wretched souls
In unrepented sin. But tendering here
Terms of redemption, it is thou, not I,
The sentence that deliverest.
Edwin. Our lives
Are in God's hands.
Dunstan. Sot, liar, miscreant, no!
God puts them into mine! and may my soul
In tortures howl away eternity

If ever again it yield to that false fear
That turned me from the shedding of thy blood!
Thy blood, rash traitor to thy God, thy blood!
Thou delicate Agag, I will spill thy blood!
Ho, Gurmo! . . . I have sinned like Saul . . . What, ho!
Gurmo, I say . . . The sword of Samuel . . . ho!

Enter GURMO.

Thou knowest thine office. Let me see thee soon.
[*Exit.*

Gurmo (*falling on his knees*). Mercy, my Lord! Oh, say you grant me life.

Edwin. Mercy for thee; what mercy canst thou show?
Yet thou art but another's senseless weapon,
And if thou needs must do thy bloody work,
Strike; I forgive thee.

Gurmo. Gracious Lord, not I.

Edwin. Then I may have some minutes more to live;
But if thou falter, soon will the Abbot find
A readier hand.

Gurmo. He knows not what I know.

Edwin. What dost thou know?

Gurmo. Hark! hear you not, my Lord?
Trumpets and shouts! Anon they storm the Tower.

Edwin. 'Tis Athulf's cry! the guards are gone! 'Tis he!

SCENE V.—*A Garden within the walls of Chester Castle.*

Elgiva (*alone*). How pleasant it might seem to a bird
of the air
Passing upon the wing, or aught that's free,
In this delightful garden to abide,
And be a captive ever. Make me free
And I myself should linger on this ground
Reluctant to depart. But as I am
The shadow of the imprisoned spirit falls
On everything around; the warbling thrush
Is tedious in the telling of his loves,
The perfume of the wallflower taints the air.
And yet in much of this adornment lurks
A lover's hand. They gave me to the ward
Of age and bitterness in Ruold's father,
Forgetting Ruold's father had a son.
I am his captive and he mine, poor youth!
For though they stripped me of my royalties,
In the prerogatives of beauty still
I found myself acknowledged. Ah! he comes.
He shall have audience. No, he's not alone.
I'll hide my head awhile. 'Tis Sigeric.

[*Retires into an arbour.*

Enter RUOLD *and* SIGERIC.

Sigeric. The King thus rescued from that imminent
fate,

The cry was now for Dunstan. Where was he?
For with his traitorous head should he atone
The meditation of that mortal blow
Which he had all but dealt. So where was he?
Gone! vanished! not a footstep to be found!
Whether by transformation magical,
Or subterranean egress, to which he,
And no one else, was privy,—how none knew,
But gone he was; and Sidroc in pursuit
Went babbling like a buckhound all abroad
That vainly seeks the slot. His creature, too,
Gruff Gurmo, disappeared.

Ruold. Ere long, be sure,
He will be heard of.

Sigeric. Should he gain the coast,
'Tis thought he'll cross to Flanders. Either way
The Primate, unto whom the King speaks fair,
Demurs not to his banishment, if so
The kingdom's wounds be healed; and with this word
He sends me to be present on his part
At Edgar's Witenagemót. When meets it?

Ruold. 'Tis summoned for the Vigil of St. Chad
At Malpas, whither is my father gone
Since yesterday. He went ensuing peace,
Constrained, though last to be constrained, to own
That peace is needful. Not a day but teems
With tidings of the Dane. He threatens now
The coasts of Somerset and Severn's mouth.

This, with the loss of Dunstan from our ranks,
And Odo's inclination, looks one way.
Sigeric. I think it brings us peace.
Ruold. Which seen, my friend,
Advise me, I beseech you. What results?
A peace is made, my father last to join
The general voice, and odious more than others
As the Queen's gaoler—how shall fare his head?
Sigeric. He must be cared for in the composition;
An amnesty for all, and him by name,
Must stand upon the treaty.
Ruold. Who shall trust it?
My friend, the terms that I would trust are terms
For service rendered.
Sigeric. If I know your drift,
You would let loose the Queen.
Ruold. And wherefore not?
Sigeric. As servant of the Primate and the State,
I say God speed you in your bold intent.
In private, as your father's friend and yours,
I bid you to beware. If peace be made,
And you have still been constant to your charge,
It is but, at the worst, uncertainties
That hang about you. But if peace be missed,
And you have set at large this royal pledge,
The very aim and purport of the war,
It shall be then no question nor surmise
What shall befall you.

Ruold. If no risk were run,
Where were the service that could claim reward?
Keep you my counsel for my father's sake,
And if at Malpas when you meet the Witan
You hear a rumour of the Queen escaped,
Call it a misadventure and mischance.

Sigeric. Save what shall reach me when I'm gone from hence
I shall know nought. God send you well to fare!

[*Exit.*

Ruold. I thank you, worthy Sigeric. Farewell.
Elgiva! Royal mistress! Beautiful Queen!
Would that the danger to my head were more,
Lest you should deem it but a politic cast,
And not a loyal venture.

Re-enter ELGIVA.

Elgiva. My good Ruold,
'Twas Sigeric went from you, was it not?
What tidings brought he?

Ruold. Madam, he confirms
Our yesterday's intelligence. The King
Is rescued by Earl Athulf. Dunstan fled.
And this besides,—Ethilda is betrothed
With solemn ceremonial to the Earl,
Though yet the nuptials are not; for the Pope
To Dunstan only gave authority

The sentence which he uttered to revoke;
And whilst the Earl is excommunicate
The Princess to the marriage rite demurs.

Elgiva. Her heart was ever scrupulous, and splits
Betwixt the Pope and Athulf. Notwithstanding,
Athulf will prosper. Ruold, faithful friend,
Now must I put thy loyalty to proof.
The letters from Earl Leolf that were brought
Are full of hope. At Audley is his force,
And with a light and deftly mounted troop
Ere midnight struck to Tilston could he come,
And me, there meeting him, could carry thence,
And pass the interspace of hostile ground
Ere break of day. No more of doubtful looks,
Dear faithful Ruold; I must brush away
These cobwebs from thy brow—Ah, now 'tis clear,
Free, frank, and bold!—Well, Ruold, what reply?

Ruold. My Royal mistress, doubts if I have had,
They were not craven nor disloyal doubts;
They were but such as fear for you proposed,
Not for myself; and now my fears are less,
My faith the same; my answer is, then,—go,
Go at your gracious pleasure, if your flight
Be deemed more safe than your captivity.

Elgiva. Oh! I am sick of safety in a prison.
Give me that dangerous liberty I seek,
And through the tossings of one turbulent night
Let me descry the harbour of my home,

With waving hands and welcomings of friends,
When 'mid the shoutings of the multitude
I shoot triumphant o'er the perilous bar
And pass at once to gladness and to peace.

Ruold. Ev'n be it as you will. But stir not yet.
Wait till the Lords have drawn their forces in
And gathered to the Witenagemót.
Then shall you send to Leolf, and appoint
The period of your flight.

Elgiva. 'Twill not be long,
Good Ruold, will it? I will try to wait.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A Heath in Hampshire.*—DUNSTAN *and* GURMO *in flight.*

Dunstan. The night shall shield us like a raven's wing.
What hear'st thou in the wind?
Gurmo. A moaning cry.
Dunstan. Thou faint'st with hunger.
Gurmo. Can I fast so long
And not be hungry?
Dunstan. 'Tis a wolf that cries,
And he is hungry too. Make forward still.
Gurmo. I see a light.
Dunstan. Hist! in the lull of the wind
I hear the stroke of hammers. On apace!
It is a blacksmith's forge. I'll harbour there.

SCENE II.—*A Blacksmith's Forge.—The* Blacksmith *at work.* Serfs *and* Boors *dropping in, with a* Monk *and others.*

Blacksmith (*blowing the bellows and singing*).

But now I wax old,
Sick, sorry, and cold,
Like muck upon mould
I widder away.

1st Boor. Look, thou horse-cobbler; call'st thou this a shoe?
I know thee; since the slaughter at the ford
Thou'rt warming old ones up.

Blacksmith. Oh me, St. Giles!

2nd Boor. And mark this coulter; look you at this mattock.

Monk. Repent and do thy work more workmanlike,
Or in a twinkling him shalt thou behold
That came to holy Dunstan's forge unbid
And staid unwilling. Marry, Sir, thy tongs
Would touch him not, and he is roaming now
Through all the land.

3rd Boor. 'Tis true; I saw myself
The print of his hoof. 'Twas in Dame Umfrieg's garth,
And Father Ægelpig discovered it.
'Twas like a goat's.

Monk. My son, he's there and here
And everywhere, since that most holy man,

The Abbot Dunstan, by the godless King
Was forced to fly.

4th Boor. I've sent for Father Crid
To bless and exorcise my cattle and swine.

Monk. Thou hast done well; but thy best safety lies
In holy Dunstan's prayers. At Winchester
Ye heard how in the west end of the church,
The night that Dunstan fled, the Devil skipped
And with great laughter in his roaring fashion
Took up his "O be joyful!" Who are these?
A brother of mine order is the one,
If I mistake not. Benedicite!

Enter DUNSTAN *and* GURMO.

Dunstan. God save you! holy brother: sons, and you!
We seek for shelter from the coming storm.

Blacksmith. Father, you're welcome.

Monk. Come ye from the south?

Dunstan. From London last.

Monk. From London? yea, indeed!
What tidings bring ye then?

Dunstan. What would ye know?

Monk. Canst thou be so insensible to ask?
The holy Abbot Dunstan—where is he?
What fate attends him?

Dunstan. That we know not yet.

Blacksmith. A price is on his head—ten thousand marks.
Lilla, the King's Gerefa of the shire,
Proclaim'd it far and wide.
Dunstan. Give me thy hammer;
Thou canst not make a coulter so; look here;
Strike endways—thus—and thus. What said the shire
To Lilla's proffer? Was it hailed with joy?
Monk. Torn down and trampled in the mud. This shire
Will yield them many a Peter with his sword,
But ne'er a Judas.
Dunstan. Is the shire so hot
In Dunstan's cause?
Monk. It kindles hourly. Nay,
'Tis said that Lilla and his men were met
On Chilton-down by fifteen hundred boors
And scantly saved themselves by flight.
1st Boor. 'Tis true;
'Twas Titchburne township that turn'd out the first:
But we of Droxford will be up betimes;
See if we be not.
Dunstan. If ye be, my friends,
The Abbot will be presently amongst you;
For this way comes he, having in his mind
To cross the sea to Flanders. But, my friends,
If ye be hearty in the cause of God
Ye will not let him go. Shame to this shire,

Shame be to England and to Christendom,
If he that fasted and that watched for you,
And day by day to save your perishing souls
Flayed his poor body streaming down with blood,—
Shame to your country and yourselves, if he
Should flee before the wicked!

Boors. We'll rise! we'll rise!
It never shall be said. He shall not flee.

Dunstan. He will not, if ye stead him in his peril.
But ye must be alert. Go forth this night,
This very night go forth, and call your friends
In all the hamlets round, to meet at Stoke
By dawn to-morrow. Thither Dunstan comes,
And ye shall bid him go no further forth.

Monk. What! Dunstan's very self? will he be there?

Dunstan. I say he will.

2nd Boor. Then, mattock, go thy ways;
I'll run to meet him.

3rd Boor. All—we all must run.
We all have souls.

Monk. Come to the abbey first,
And ye shall have your doublets lined with mead,
Wherewith defended ye may face the storm,
Flying from house to house, and send the news
From village on to village.

Blacksmith. And, father, you,
And this your friend, shall rest the while with me.

SCENE III.—*Derby.*

EDWIN *and* ATHULF.

Athulf. With patience we shall prosper. That alone
Is wanting to us now.
Edwin. Nay, do not chide.
I have been patient, Athulf, in my cell;
Patient of wrongs and cruelties and threats,
Sickness and imminent death; but this is worse;
To be at large, and yet be checked and curbed,
When now my wife's deliverance only waits
On my advance.
Athulf. With measured speed we pass
To an assured result; with hurried steps
We should but bring the shadow of a host
To issues that would then be full of doubt.
Our marches are too hasty, and the force
Begins to break. Pause, I beseech you.
Edwin. Well;
You are a soldier tried in many a field;
And I am but a King. Have, then, your way.
Athulf. So please you, then, pass onward to the front,
Whilst I hang back and gather up the rear.

SCENE IV.—*Audley in Staffordshire.*

LEOLF *and* EMMA.

Emma. Could not the Queen await the coming up
Of the King's army? Must she hazard yours?
Leolf. My army moves not. A few mounted thanes
Alone go with me. No, she hazards nought,—
Nought that is worth a care, except herself.
Emma. She hazards all.
Leolf. True, for her safety's sake
I could have wished her to let time declare
What should ensue at Malpas. But the signs
Bid fair for peace, and barring misadventure . . .
Emma. 'Tis a rash reckoning in such times as these
That bars a misadventure.
Leolf. Nay, not so.
With Dunstan fled the spirit of the storm,
And Indiscretion, that was fain to hide
Its battered plumage, now may gambol forth
On bolder wing.—Earl Sidroc, by my life!
Welcome to Audley!

Enter SIDROC.

Sidroc. Nay, Lord Heretoch, nay;
Before you make me welcome, hear my news.

Leolf. No, you are welcome. If your news be bad,
Welcome the more, for then the more's the need
Of your good counsel.
Sidroc. Dunstan is at large—
Nay more, has joined the Witenagemót.
I chased him to the coast, where in a night
The boors of Hampshire rose five thousand strong
And snatched him from my hands.
Leolf. At Malpas now!
Already there!
Sidroc. I fear he is indeed.
But have you then no tidings? Hear you not
From Malpas?
Leolf. We had looked to hear anon.
There comes a fellow with an open mouth
And eager eye.

Enter Messenger.

The sequel? Speak, my friend;
What more beside the message in thy face?
Messenger. The Abbot is at Malpas.
Leolf. That we knew,
Or nearly knew. What did he then when there?
Messenger. He called the Witenagemót together
And bade them never more to speak of peace
Until the Church were founded in her rights.
Leolf. And he was heard?

Messenger. By some he was opposed
That stood around him, but the floor fell in
And they went headlong; on the only beam
That brake not, Dunstan, standing undismayed,
Stretched forth his arm and bade the multitude
Confess the hand of God.

Sidroc. By Peter's Keys
Another miracle and a murder too
Done by this cunning carpenter!

Leolf. What next
Needs not be asked. Peace was renounced, no doubt?

Messenger. It was, my Lord.

Emma. The salvage may be high,
But something there is saved by this. The Queen
Will now sit close.

Leolf. I know not that; foul winds
Preach patience; but adversity, to some
So sedative, to others is a goad.
Aught that disturbs her, hurries her to act.
—Then hears the King her husband of her peril,
And he is hurried past his reason too.—
I pray you come. But, Ernway, get you ready
To carry letters south.

[*Exeunt* LEOLF *and* SIDROC.

Emma. Now will he write
Commending care and patience to the King,
And take the danger solely to himself.
But think you, Seneschal, the Earl's dear life

Should thus be thrown amongst the enemy
And all of us behind?

Seneschal. What else can I?

Emma. Why this: So soon as he is gone, the force
Is at thy order—move it on to Lea,
Whence thou canst see, if aught ensue amiss,
To Leolf's safe return.

Seneschal. Nay, but the King,
If he be patient to the Heretoch's wish,
Will be but late to join us though we wait;
And should we move . . .

Emma. The King will follow fast
Once he shall know you gone; which that he shall
In all its import know, trust to my care,
For I will forth with Ernway, and perchance
In this affair my counsel with the King
Shall weigh as heavy as the Heretoch's.

SCENE V.—*Malpas.*—DUNSTAN *surrounded by* Ealdermen *and* Military Leaders *of the Monastic Party.*

Dunstan. No more of Witenagemóts—no more—
Councils and courts we want not.—Get ye back,
Back to your posts, and pluck me forth your swords,
And let me hear your valiant deeds resound,
And not your empty phrases. Ecfrid, Gorf,

Look to your charges—Nantwich stands exposed—
Whitchurch lies open to the enemy—
Burley and Baddeley have sold themselves—
Wistaston is as naked as Godiva
And not so honest. Eadbald, Ida, Brand,
What seek ye here when honour is in the field?
Forth to your charges!—What! Ceolwulf too!

Enter the Coastwardens, CEOLWULF *and* ÆTHELRIC.

And Æthelric! Why come ye hither, Sirs?
Must ye too have your parley and your prate
And leave your charges in extremity
To join this gossiping Gemót? St. Bride!
Is Somerset not worth your pains, my Lords,
Or hath the Dane, too, from the seaboard slunk
To prattle about peace?

Ceolwulf. Lord Abbot, hear;
We are not come . . .

Dunstan. Not come to pule and prate?
What are ye come for? If aught else ye seek,
Ye seek it where it is not. Back to your charge!

Æthelric. You will not hear, my Lord; we have no charge—
We have no force; our men are slain, ourselves
Escaped by miracle; the Northmen, led
By Sweyne and Olaf, landed yesternight
In Porlock Bay and clipped us round at Stoke,

And thinned as we had been, we fell perforce
An easy prey. Not twenty men are left
To tell the tale.

Dunstan. In Porlock Bay! At Stoke!
—Have I not bid you to your posts, my Lords,
And must I bid you twice? Get ye hence all.
If news ye came for, ye have heard it.—Stop,
Ceolwulf. Whither go the Northmen next?

Ceolwulf. To Glastonbury it is thought, my Lord.

Dunstan. To Glastonbury do they go? Alas!
My mother there lies sick.

SCENE VI.—*Ashborn in Derbyshire.*

EDWIN *and* ATHULF.

Edwin. Still this is gained,—the everlasting word
"Halt!" shall be heard no more; and never more
Shall my heart sicken at its detested sound.
Now, thinking of Elgiva close at hand,
We shall be filled with her victorious cheer.

Athulf. I would to God that I could think her wise.
All is in jeopardy through her. By Heaven!
I know not which is worst—to come too late,
Or come with broken strength.

Edwin. To come too late
Is worst by far. When Leolf went from Audley

'Tis true he bade us to beware of haste;
But then he knew not that the enemy's force
Would move on Nantwich, thus, with his at Lea,
To bring them cheek-by-jowl, whilst us it leaves
More laggard than we were.
Athulf. I'll stake my head
'Twas ne'er by Leolf's wish his force was moved
So far as Lea; but be it so or not,
'Twas moved in error; it can bring no aid
To Leolf and Elgiva; nay, I fear,
'Twill draw the forces of the enemy down
Upon the very wayside of their flight.
Still moved it is, and I deny not now
That we should follow at our best of speed.

SCENE VII.—*Night. A Coppice near Acton in Cheshire. —In front is a mortstone. Enter certain* Retainers *and* Servants *of* LEOLF.

1st Servant. This is the road; bring up the horses, ho!
Hark! heard'st thou aught? If Dunstan knew, my friends,
He'd ope his book and read a verse of power,
And send a goblin that should . . .
2nd Servant. Hush! thou fool!
Is it not hither the Earl should come?

1st Servant. 'Tis here,
Six furlongs from the chapel. What is this?
Oh me! the mortstone! No, it is not here;
'Tis further on.

3rd Servant. Seest thou not something white?

1st Servant. Jesu Maria, save us! 'tis a Spirit.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter LEOLF *and* ELGIVA.

Leolf. Fresh horses should have met us here; what chance
Hath hindered them, I know not; we must wait
Till these be rested. Here is a rude stone-seat;
We may rest likewise.

Elgiva. Is there danger still?

Leolf. But little here; the dangers of the road,
I trust, are left behind.

Elgiva. Oh, Leolf! much
I owe you, and if aught a kingdom's wealth
Affords, could pay the debt . . .

Leolf. A kingdom's wealth!
Elgiva! by the heart the heart is paid.
You have your kingdom, my heart has its love.
We are provided.

Elgiva. Oh! in deeds so kind,
And can you be so bitter in your words!
Have I no offerings of the heart, wherewith
Love's service to requite?

Leolf. The least of boons
Scattered by royal charity's careless hand
O'erpays my service; to requite the rest
All you possess is but a bankrupt's bond.
This is the last time we shall speak together;
Forgive me, therefore, if my speech be bold
And need not an expositor to come.
I loved you once; and in such sort I loved
That anguish has but burnt the image in
And I must bear it with me to my grave.
I loved you once; dearest Elgiva, yes,
Ev'n now my heart is feeding on that love
As in its flower and freshness, ere the grace
And beauty of the fashion of it perished.
It was too anxious to be fortunate,
And it must now be buried, self-embalmed
Within my breast, or living there recluse
Talk to itself and traffic with itself;
And like a miser that puts nothing out
And asks for no return, must I tell o'er
The treasures of the past.

Elgiva. Can no return
Be rendered? And is gratitude then nothing?

Leolf. To me 'tis nothing—being less than love;
But cherish it as to your own soul precious;
The heavenliest lot that earthly natures know
Is to be affluent in gratitude.
Be grateful and be happy. For myself,

If sorrow be my portion, yet shall hope,
That springs from sorrow and aspires to heaven,
Be with me still. When this disastrous war
Is ended, I shall quit my country's shores
A pilgrim and a suitor to the love
Which dies not nor betrays.—What cry is that?
I thought I heard a voice.

Elgiva. Oh, Leolf, Leolf!
So tender, so severe!

Leolf. Mistake me not;
I would not be unjust; I have not been;
Now less than ever could I be, for now
A sacred and judicial calmness holds
Its mirror to my soul; at once disclosed
The picture of the past presents itself
Minute yet vivid, such as it is seen
In his last moments by a drowning man.
Look at this skeleton of a once green leaf;
Time and the elements conspired its fall;
The worm has eaten out the tenderer parts
And left this curious anatomy
Distinct of structure—made so by decay;
So at this moment lies my life before me
In all its intricacies, all its errors,
And can I be unjust?

Elgiva. Oh, more than just,
Most merciful in judgment have you been,
And ev'n in censure kind.

Leolf. Our lives were linked
By one misfortune and a double fault.
It was my folly to have fixed my hopes
Upon the fruitage of a budding heart;
It was your fault,—the lighter fault by far,—
Being the bud to seem to be the berry.
The first inconstancy of unripe years
Is nature's error on the way to truth.
But, hark! another cry! they call us hence;
Why come they not to us? Hark! Hist! again!
A clash of swords! Our band then is beset;
Alas, Elgiva!

Elgiva. Leolf, we are lost.
Say, is it so? I am not afraid; but, oh!
Forgive me, Leolf, for I have wronged in you
The noblest of your kind. Oh, Edwin! . . . Leolf,
Tell him that I was true till death to him,
Though sometime false to you.

Leolf. Fly, fly, Elgiva!
Our horses are at hand—we still may fly.

SCENE VIII.—*Lea in Cheshire.*

EDWIN, ATHULF, *and* SIDROC.

Sidroc. Neither of them nor those that with them went
Nor those that went to meet them, can I glean
One grain of tidings. Even lies are scarce

And false reports arrive not.

Athulf. They are lost.

Edwin. Peace, Athulf! If you would not I lost heart
Now, when my courage will be needed most,
Speak not that word again. They shall be found.
Let us but march on Malpas.

Sidroc. By the way
It may be we shall meet them. But if news
Of them be wanting, of the Danes 'tis rife.
In Somerset, which now they leave behind,
Town, hamlet, monastery, church and grange,
Lie smoking; and at Glastonbury Sweyne
Wasted the Abbot's lands, his treasure took,
And scared his bedrid mother, that she fled,
Though seized with mortal sickness.

Athulf. Hurt to her
Strikes at the human corner of his heart.

Sidroc. Upon him now, then, while his cheer is low.

Athulf. Oh, Sidroc! what is ours?

Edwin. Nay, hope the best;
Sidroc is right; on Malpas let us march,
Sending the women to our friends in Wales.

SCENE IX.—*Malpas.*

BRIDFERTH *and* RUOLD.

Bridferth. He is in much perplexity of mind;
You cannot see him. Since his mother's death
He comes not from his chamber, save at night
When the sad brethren of St. Benedict
Say masses for her soul.

Ruold. His mother dead!

Bridferth. At Glastonbury she lay sick, and thence
Driven by the Dane, the terror of her flight,
Conspiring with her malady, put out
Her spark of life. To her great son she sent
Her dying charge that he as best he might
Should heal his country's wounds and give it peace,
And rescue from the Northmen's ravages
Its poor remains.

Ruold. Indeed! His mother dead!
Well, had he lost ten mothers ten times told
Still must I see him.

Bridferth. What's your errand, then,
That is so instant? Of the Queen's escape
He knows already.

Ruold. That is not the last
Nor yet the sharpest of the untoward strokes
That destiny hath dealt us. What I know
I fear to tell, save to the Abbot's self.

But, lo, he comes! And by my life I shrink
From telling it to him. Stand back a space.

[*They retire.* DUNSTAN *enters.*

Dunstan. Why did I quit the cloister? I have fought
The battles of Jehovah; I have braved
The perfidies of courts, the wrath of Kings,
Desertion, treachery,—and I murmured not,—
The fall from puissance, the shame of flight,
The secret knife, the public proclamation,—
And how am I rewarded? God hath raised
New enemies against me,—from without
The furious Northman,—from within, far worse,
Heart-sickness and a subjugating grief.
She was my friend—I had but her—no more,
No other upon earth—and as for Heaven,
I am as they that seek a sign, to whom
No sign is given. My mother! Oh, my mother!
—Who's this? What are you, Sir? What brings you here?
Oh, ho! I know you; you are Ruold; well,
What news from Chester? Easy watch you kept
Upon Elgiva. Let that pass. What more?
Your father's merits have redeemed your head
That else was forfeited.

Ruold. Lord Abbot, still
It stands a forfeit, if adversity,
Loss and disaster make a forfeiture.
Chester is burnt. The Dane came up the Dee,

And landing in the night, ere break of day
Slew half my force and fired the town.

Dunstan. So! so!
Deemedst thou that this should jeopardize thy head?
Far otherwise. But send Harcather here.
This news is welcome.

[*Exeunt* RUOLD *and* BRIDFERTH.

Is it not welcome? Yes;
It rings a shrill alarum in mine ears,
Telling me that the murderers of my mother
Are come to judgment. Give me back, O God,
My health of heart, and waken me to wield
The weapons of thine anger. Oh, my mother!
Thy deathbed was illuminate from Heaven
And in the glory of prophetic light
Thy soul departed. From thy place thou seest
Thy word fulfilled—the Heathen hems us round—
Next shalt thou see thy son perform thy bidding,
And gathering into one the broken force
Of this divided realm, with headlong might
Reject the Northmen to their native rocks.

Enter HARCATHER.

Harcather, we are threatened, hear'st thou not?
The raven that was watching from afar
Our mortal throes, deems that she now can tear
The body of the land. Nay, ravenous Dane,

We are not yet exanimate. Let all
That ever dreamt that they were Christians, join
To fight against these robbers of the sea
And hurl them backward to their brine. Proclaim
A peace betwixt King Edwin and the Church—
In furtherance whereof will I divulge
Letters of absolution for those Earls
And others that are excommunicate.
Send me a Herald to King Edwin's camp.
What staggering knave is this, with bloodstain'd pate
And livid lips? 'Tis Gurmo. What bring'st thou?
The Queen? Where is she? Hast thou got her safe?
He cannot speak.

Gurmo (*who has entered*). Lord Abbot, she is dead.

Dunstan. Dead! By what chance? Alive I bid thee take her,
And wherefore is she dead?

Gurmo. Her horse was fleet,
But fleeter is an arrow than a horse.
An arrow from my bow is in her heart.
And Leolf, too, is slain. But lo! I bleed;
For ere they slew him, I was hurt to death
And by his hand. Short shrift for me I wot!
A priest—a priest—not you, Lord Abbot, no—
King Edwin now comes rushing on—look out
Or you shall be surprised.

Dunstan. Harcather, fly;
The forces that are scattered draw together

And plant them close and strong. A Herald send,
I say again, with overtures to Edwin,
Inviting him to peace. A priest, good Gurmo?
No, 'tis myself must shrive thee; to my cell
Supporthim. Is he dead? Not yet—not yet.

SCENE X.—*A Village on the Borders of Wales.*

ETHILDA, EMMA, ERNWAY, *and* SIDROC.

Sidroc. To Ernway's escort must I leave you now,
Lest my return should find a foughten field
And not a field to fight. The road is safe,
And Ruthin Castle you will reach ere long,
With a warm welcome from the good Ap Rhys.

Ethilda. When shall the tidings of the battle come
To Ruthin Castle?

Sidroc. When to-morrow's sun
Behind the summit of Llanvarroch sinks,
Look down the valley. If the day be won,
A white flag flying in a horseman's hand
Shall fan you from afar, and kindle joy
In all your hearts.

Emma. No, never more in mine.

Sidroc. If it be lost, perchance you shall descry
Some remnant that may fight their way to Wales,
In shelter of the mountains to abide

Till better times.

Ethilda. Commend me to the King,
And tell Earl Athulf I am strong in hope,
Rejoicing alway in his absolution,
And trusting we shall meet to part no more.

SCENE XI.—*The Walls of Malpas.*

DUNSTAN, HARCATHER, *and a* Messenger.

Dunstan. "The Dane! The Dane!" Why pesterest thou mine ears
With that perpetual cry? How face the Dane,
Not knowing yet if Edwin be for peace?

Harcather. For peace, Lord Abbot! nay, he cannot choose.

Dunstan. Let me know that, I say; let me know that.
See ye the Herald coming?

Messenger. Ay, my Lord.

Harcather. At Herald's pace; these fellows dream and prance
Ever as in a pageant and procession.

Dunstan. I bade him,—when in sight of Edwin's camp.

Harcather. If he be now in sight thereof, that camp
Is nearer than we thought. It may be so.

Messenger. But lo! he pricks his prancing to a gallop;

And see, my Lord, from forth the valley's gorge
Issues a cloud of dust.

Harcather. By Egbert's bones
It is the dust of Edwin's army. Stay—
A gleam comes through it—run thou to my son,
And bid him lead the vanguard out forthwith.
Send me my horse.

Dunstan. What think'st thou? Is it war?

Harcather. Else wherefore this advance? To horse! to horse!

Dunstan. Stop; be not hasty; now the Herald comes;
Hear we his tale.

HERALD *enters.*

Well, Sir, what saith the King?

Herald. He saith, my Lord, what I should but blaspheme
Should I recite it.

Dunstan. What! thine office, Herald!
Speak me the very words.

Herald. My Lord, he saith
That with a bloody and a barbarous hand
You have torn out the very sweetest life
That ever sanctified humanity.
He saith that should he covenant to make peace
With the revolted Angels, yet with you
He would not; for he deems you more accursed

And deeper in perdition. And he saith
Not she that died at Gibeah, whose twelve parts
Sent several through the borders and the coasts
Raised Israel, was avenged more bloodily
Than shall Elgiva be, the murder'd Queen.
Wherefore he bids you come to battle forth,
And add another crime or answer this.

Dunstan. Harcather, hear'st thou? To the field—away!
The gates of Hell stand wider than their wont
To let this infidel and his army pass!

SCENE XII.—*Before the Walls of Malpas.—The left of the field. Alarums and skirmishing. Enter* ATHULF *and* SIDROC *with forces.*

Athulf. Three minutes till the rearward force is up—
Halt for three minutes—Sidroc, look, oh, look!
The King is plunging madly forward still;
Either an ambush he will find or else
They'll lure him through the gates. Go to him, Sidroc.

Sidroc. No need of ambush for that headlong boy;
A town is not so manifest a trap
But it shall catch him.

Athulf. Fly, then, to his side,

And bring him back. I cannot go myself,
For now the rearward gathers up behind,
And lo! Harcather comes against us. Charge!

SCENE XIII.—*Before the Walls of Malpas.— The right of the field. A body of* Monks *are seen ranged on the walls, holding up crosses and relics. In front,* EDWIN *with forces.*

Edwin. Nay, stagger ye at a show of hoods and gowns!
It is a murderer's disguise, I say,
And not a Christian's garb.—What spectre foul
Is yon that rises o'er the ruined wall?
I see the accursed Abbot's skinny hand
Held up aloft! Now God befriend the right!

SCENE XIV.—*Before the Walls of Malpas.—The left of the field. Alarums and a retreat sounded.* ATHULF *with a remnant of his force, and* RUOLD.

Athulf. I knew you not; why pressed you thus upon us,
Alone and wounded as you are? Fall back.
Ruold. I seek my death,—but, Athulf, not from you.

Athulf. Oh, gentle Ruold, in my sister's right
I bid you live.
Ruold. Her spirit calls me hence.
Had I been resolute, she had lived to-day.
Farewell, brave Athulf. You have lost your King.
[*Exit.*
Athulf. It shall not be. Nay, hold your ground, my friends;
Turn on them—'tis the last time—ay, the last—
Lo! there Earl Sidroc gallops from the right
To tell us if the King can yet be saved.
Stand fast but till he comes. Crossbow-men, see!
They round the hill, the villains! Shoot together—
There flies the sleet that whistles in their beards—
Charge once again—no archery like yours!
And here comes Sidroc. Well, how fares the King?

Enter SIDROC.

Sidroc. Outwitted, lost, inveigled, snared, and worse,
If worse it be, wounded—they say to death.
Soon as the execrable shape appeared
Of Dunstan on the walls, the tempest rose
Upon his heart and drave him to his fate.
Athulf, away! for longer now to stand
Were worse than vain.
Athulf. They circle us about,
But we shall break their circle to their cost.

Well have ye battled for your King, brave hearts!
And now I bid you but to save yourselves.
Look not too narrowly at the fence, but leap;
And if it chance, as like enough it may,
That we be scattered, we shall meet again
At Ruthin, whither is the Princess fled.
Round her we rally. Ride, Sirs, for your lives.

SCENE XV.—*Malpas.—Interior of the Cathedral. Candles burning and altars decked as for a service of thanksgiving. A corpse lies on a bier in the transept, and the chaunting of a service for the dead is heard at intervals from a side-chapel.* Monks *enter in procession, and lastly* DUNSTAN.

Dunstan. So flee the works of darkness. Sing ye the psalm
"*Quid gloriaris.*"—Stop: a hasty step
Rings in the cloister.

Enter a Soldier.

Soldier. I am bid, my Lord,
To seek the Lord Harcather, for his son
Ruold is slain.

Dunstan. Silence! no more of that;

Harcather is gone forth to meet the Dane;
Let him not know it yet.

Enter BRIDFERTH.

Well, Bridferth, well?

Bridferth. Athulf and Sidroc have escaped, my Lord,
The prisoners say, and as I learn elsewhere,
Doing much havoc in their desperate flight.

Dunstan. 'Tis true. I thought no less.—What corse is this?

A Monk. The Queen's, my Lord, awaiting burial.

Dunstan. Hers?—
Withdraw the winding-sheet, that once again
I may behold her.—Art thou she indeed!
The blankness of mortality in thee
Seems more than in another. Where be now
The flushings of the fervent cheek, the fires
That lightened from those eyes! Oh, rueful sight!
Methinks that thou dost look reproachfully.
Not me—not me—upbraid not me, pale Queen!
I slew thee not, nor yet desired thy death;
I would have willed thee to repent and live,
But lo! the will of God hath mastered mine.

Chaunt from the side-chapel.

"*Quando caro sepelitur,*
Heu! de spiritu nil scitur,
Utrum gaudet an punitur.

" *Quis orabit pro delicto?*
Quis spondebit pro convicto?
Quis judicio tam stricto
Fiet in præsidium?"

—Better be so than be the living cause
Of death eternal and a nation's lapse
To mortal sin. Nor sin nor sorrow now
Hath power upon thee; nor canst thou, fair mask,
Be ever more their minister.

Enter an Attendant.

Attendant. My Lord,
The King, so please you——
Dunstan. What, Sir, of the King?
Attendant. He is again delirious, and hath torn
The bandage from his wound. He bleeds amain.

Chaunt again.

" *Et si pœnas infernales*
Agnovisses, quæ et quales,
Tuos utique carnales
Appetitus frangeres;

" *Et innumera peccata,*
Dicta, facta, cogitata,
Mente tota consternata
Merito deplangeres."

Enter another Attendant.

Attendant. My Lord, the King, the King!
Dunstan. What! comes he hither?

Enter EDWIN, *followed by a* Physician *and* Attendants.

Edwin. Where art thou, my beloved? Come to me!
Art thou not here? They said so, but 'twas false—
Thou art not here, for if thou wert, I know
Thou'dst fly to meet me.—Ha! I see thee now—
And yet thou mov'st not. What! in chains again!
Not so, Elgiva—thou art free, my love—
I smote them with the sword. Oh, come to me!
Give me thy hand.

Dunstan. Doctor, thou mad'st report
The fever had abated.

The Physician. Had, my Lord;
But rages now afresh.

Dunstan. How came he hither?

Attendant. He asked us if the Queen were buried yet,
Or where the body lay; we told him, here;
And he commanded we should bring him.

Dunstan. See!

Edwin. Thy hand is very cold.—Come, come, look up.
Hast not a word to say to so much love?
Well—as thou wilt—but 'twas not always thus.
So soon to be forgotten! Oh, so soon!
And I have loved so truly all this while!—
I dream—I do but dream—I think.—What's here?
'Tis not the dress that thou wert wont to wear.

This is a corpse! Attendance, here! What, ho!
Who was so bold to bring a stone-cold corpse
Into the King's apartment? Stop—be still—
I know not that. Give me but time, my friends,
And I will tell you.

The Physician. Draw him from the corpse:
This loss of blood that drains the fever off
Anon will bring him to himself.

A Monk. My Lord,
I hear a shout as of a multitude
In the north suburb.

Dunstan. Bridferth, mount the tower
And look abroad.

Edwin. That was a voice I knew—
It came from darkness and the Pit—but hark!
An Angel's song . . . 'Tis Dunstan that I see!
Rebellious monk! I lay my body down
Here at thy feet to die, but not my soul,
Which goes to God. The cry of innocent blood
Is up against thee, and the Avenger's cry
Shall answer it. Support me, Sirs, I pray;
Be patient with me . . . there was something still . . .
I know not what . . . under your pardon . . . yes . . .
Touching my burial . . . did I not see but now
Another corpse . . . I pray you, Sirs, . . . there . . .
there . . .

[*Dies.*

Bridferth (*from the tower*). My Lord, my Lord, Harcather flies; the Danes
Are pouring through the gate. Harcather falls.

Dunstan. Give me the crucifix. Bring out the relics.
Host of the Lord of Hosts, forth once again!

THE END.

NOTES.

PREFACE.

"The prayer of the Anglo-Saxon Liturgy for deliverance à furore Northmannorum."

THE Anglo-Saxon ritual of the Cathedral Church at Durham, printed by the Surtees Society, contains some curious specimens of the religious services of the period. I am tempted to quote the invocation by which the Devil was prevented from riding upon horses, goats, and swine: "Habraham, Habraham! equos, capras, et porcusque benedic latrinibus, angelus qui positus est super animalia nostra custodiat ea, ut non poterit Diabolus inequitare illa. Habraham teneat vos per ac divinitas Dei, Deus ad dexteram, angelus ad sinistram, propheta vos prosequentur, martyres antecedant vos, patronesque persequentur, vos custodiat Dominus oves et boves, vitulos, equos et apes, custodiantque vos his pastores. Signum crucis Christi Jesu, in nomine Dei summi, per Dominum——"

I will add the "oratio" which was used on the occasion of shaving a virgin beard: "Deus cujus spiritu creatura omnis adulta congaudet, exaudi preces nostras super hunc famulum tuum juvenilis ætatis decore lætantem, et primis auspiciis adtondendum; exaudi, Domine, ut in omnibus protectionis

tuæ munitus auxilio, cœlestem benedictionem accipiat, et præsentis vitæ presidiis gaudeat et æterne, per—— "

The former of these offices represents the superstition of the Anglo-Saxon Church in all its grossness: the latter, though it may excite a smile, ought, however, to be regarded with respect, as one of those tendernesses of religious care with which the Church in old times watched over the lives of its members.

Page 66, Act II., Scene III.

" Have they bought her with bracelets
And lured her with gold?"

With the Anglo-Saxons, bracelets were amongst the forms in which wealth was hoarded or passed from hand to hand.

Page 77, Act II., Scene V.

" Keep the King's peace? If longer than three minutes
I keep it, may I die in my bed like a cow!"

I have been induced here to preserve a flower of speech recorded in one of the chronicles of the time, though perhaps a little more peculiar than what I should otherwise have employed.

Page 82, Act II., Last Scene.

" Oh, God!
I pray Thee that Thou shorten not my days,
Ceasing to honour this disnatured flesh
That was my mother."

This is borrowed from "The Revenger's Tragedy," by Cyril Tourneur.

" Forgive me, Heaven, to call my mother wicked!
Oh, lessen not my days upon the earth:
I cannot honour her."

Page 108, Act III., Scene V.

"Against the gust remitting fiercelier burns
The fire, than with the gust it burnt before."

"Existimantur incendia illa qui fiunt flante vento forti, majores progressus facere adversus ventum, quam secundum ventum; quia scilicet flamma resilit motu perniciore, vento remittente, quam procedit, vento impellente."—*Nov. Organon*, ii. 13.

Page 116, Act III., Scene VII.

"Cumba is my gauge,
And by the crown of his head I know the times.
Grow they ascetic, then his tonsure widens;
Or free, it narrows in."

The tonsure was enforced upon the secular clergy, as well as on the regulars; and as the Anglo-Saxons were very proud of their hair, this was a point of discipline which sometimes gave rise to difficulties.

Page 127, Act III., Scene VIII.

"He bids you know that in this land this day
He finds more fat than bones, more monks than men."

I have taken the words of Fuller: "Indeed, one may safely affirm that the multitudes of monasteries invited the invasion and facilitated the conquest of the Danes over England . . . . because England had at this time more flesh or fat than bones, wherein the strength of a body consists; more monks than military men."—*Church History*, Book ii. s. 51.

Page 157, Act V., Scene II.

"But now I wax old,
Sick, sorry, and cold,
Like muck upon mould
I widder away."

I have taken the liberty to borrow this from the "Processus Noe," one of the Towneley Mysteries, printed by the Surtees Society. In another place I have taken a mode of expression from the following lines in the "Mactatio Abel":—

"Felowes, here I you forbede
To make nother nose nor cry:
Whoso is so hardy to do that dede,
The Devylle hang hym up to dry."

Page 158, Act V., Scene II.

"At Winchester
Ye heard how in the west end of the church,
The night that Dunstan fled, the Devil skipped
And with great laughter in his roaring fashion
Took up his 'O be joyful!'"

"The Divell was heard in the west end of the church, taking up a great laughter after his roaring manner, as though he should show himself glad and joyful at Dunstan's going into exile."—*Holinshed*, chap. 23.

Page 168, Act V., Scene VII.

Stage direction—"In front is a mortstone."

This was a large stone by the way-side between a distant village and the parish church, on which the bearers of a dead body rested the coffin.

ISAAC COMNENUS.

A PLAY.

DEDICATION OF THE SECOND EDITION,

Dated 8th February, 1845.

TO THE

LORD MONTEAGLE OF BRANDON.

DEAR LORD MONTEAGLE,

When this work was first published, in the confidence of youth, I sent it into the world naked, to shift for itself, without name, preface, or dedication. It is in a different mood that I republish it now; and wishing to indicate my sense of its faults and deficiencies, I know not that I can do so in any better way than by dedicating it to one whose judgment in art is invariably tempered by a spirit of genial indulgence to all mankind, and whose indulgence is even more than proportionately kind in the case of those who have a domestic claim to his regard. Allow me, therefore, to commit this work to your protection, and thus to have the pleasure of linking a part of my life when I was unknown to you, with that happier portion of it which has elapsed since I have been allied with your family.

Believe me,
Sincerely and affectionately yours,

HENRY TAYLOR.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

NICEPHORUS BOTONIATES, *Emperor of the East.*
THE PATRIARCH OF THE GREEK CHURCH.
THE ABBOT OF ST. CONON'S.
ISAAC COMNENUS, } *Counts of the Empire and Mili-*
ALEXIUS COMNENUS, *his Brother,* } *tary Commanders.*
MACRINUS, *a Military Leader under Isaac Comnenus.*
NUMERIAN, *another.*
GERMANUS, *a Courtier.*
BALBINUS, *a Monk.*

EUDOCIA COMNENA, *Sister of the Comneni.*
ANNA COMNENA, *Cousin of the Comneni.*
THEODORA, *Daughter of the Emperor.*

Monks, Acolytes, Citizens, Soldiers, Eunuchs, Eparchs, Exorcist, etc., etc., etc.

SCENE—*Constantinople and its environs.*

TIME.—*The year of our Lord* 1088.

ISAAC COMNENUS.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*The Palace of the Comneni.*

ISAAC COMNENUS *and* MACRINUS.

Comnenus. It will not keep, Macrinus; in such things
There is a rotten ripeness supervenes
On the first moment of maturity.

Macrinus. I well believe, my Lord, that more such schemes
Have failed from over-wariness than rashness.

Comnenus. Then be our last convention held to-night;
And see that all be summoned.

Macrinus. I'll look to it.

Comnenus. And I must to the palace.

Macrinus. The worse errand.

Comnenus. It is unseasonable, but not dangerous.
I know Nicephorus well; his roof is safe;

He'd rather that an accident befell me
In any place than there.

Macrinus. I hope, my Lord,
You put not too much trust in Theodora.

Comnenus. In her? no—little enough. I could secure her,
But having not a stomach to the means,
I fain would fancy that I do not want her.
Here comes a Lordling of her train. Good-day.

Enter GERMANUS.

Germanus. My noble Lord, the Cæsarissa waits
With infinite impatience to behold you:
She bids me say so. Ah! most noble Count!
A fortunate man—the sunshine is upon you——

Comnenus. Ay, Sir, and wonderfully warm it makes me.
Tell her I'm coming, Sir, with speed. Farewell.

[*Exit* GERMANUS.

Didst thou take heed of yon homunculus?

Macrinus. Ay, my Lord, I marked him.

Comnenus. We work in the dark and know not what we do;
He that begot him meant him for a man,
And yet thou seest the issue. After dusk,
As soon as may be after dusk, Macrinus,
We meet again.

SCENE II.—*The Palace of the Cæsars.*

NICEPHORUS *and* THEODORA.

Nicephorus. The Count not yet arrived! still more and more
He shows a purposed tardiness.
Theodora. Not he!
'Tis not his way to measure out the time
As huxtering the minutes.
Nicephorus. True—but still . . .
The tidings that Alexius is recalled
Cannot have reached him yet?
Theodora. Surely they cannot.
Nicephorus. Unless by treachery.
Theodora. Whom suspect you now?
Nicephorus. Nay, no one—none—but yet it may be so;
And he might thence surmise some ill intent
Was harboured here against him.
Theodora. If he should
It were more like he came before the time
Than lingered. But you bear an evil mind
Towards him, and 'tis looking in that glass
You see distrust and thence suspect suspicion.
Nicephorus. On both sides cause enough; but none so blind
As they that will not see.
Theodora. And none so lost
As they that know not and that will not know

How dangerous is fear. By phantoms scared
You left the safe and sought the perilous road,
And you have found it.

Nicephorus. Perils there may be;
But such as I shall know the end of soon.
'Tis time this tampering with an enemy
Should cease. 'Tis now a tedious half-year
That it has stumbled on to humour thee,
And thou art not content.

Theodora. To humour me!
Yes, 'twas my humour that your head and crown
Should not be ventured in a needless strife
Nor staked for sport.

Nicephorus. Thou answerest idly, child.
The strife will come—more desperate by delay.
Advances have been made, if seemly all,
Or less than seemly some, I spare to speak;
And not by deed, I doubt if ev'n by word,
Is aught vouchsafed that we can call a pledge.

Theodora. Count Isaac's lightest words mean something more
Than in court-currency they pass for. You
Nor any man beside can say how far
His heart is pledged.

Nicephorus. Why, thus much may be said;
Were it his choice to join his house to mine
And take a safe succession for thy dower,
Knowing the contract might be made at once,

Nought would be left in doubt. All the light words
Of courtesy on which thou build'st thy hopes
Do but dissimulate the other choice—
A choice resolved—to wit, to try his strength
With ours in war.

Theodora. 'Tis you drive on the trial;
He never would have sought it, so your fears
Had let him live in peace; but evermore
You feared and feared till dangerous you made him.

Nicephorus. Have I not shown him every favour due—
Ordered the triumph for his victories,
Myself partaking the festivities?

Theodora. 'Twould scarcely be acknowledged as it ought
Since that ill accident, the taster's death
Who tasted of the cup you proffered him.

Nicephorus. Ill accidents are ever in thy mouth.

Theodora. And since his triumph in the frontier war,
What has been wanting—what but open strife,
To bid him be prepared for self-defence?
Have you not loosed the hydra of the State—
Have you not stirred the vermin of the Church—
Made compact with the natural enemies
Of order and of empire to molest him?
And you would have him move no step to meet you?

Nicephorus. Too many steps—too many and too long,
Too many strides Count Isaac has advanced
That ever he should stay his foot in peace
Short of the throne. An enemy he is,

And as such must be dealt with. Cease not thou,
Meantime, to show him favour. But beware
Thou lead'st to no surmise that aught impends . . .
That aught . . . I bid thee once again beware
That thou endanger not thy filial faith.
It is not fitting that I meet him now:
Wherefore, thus warned, I leave thee.

[*Exit.*

Theodora. Warned, and feared.
Had I been trusted freely from the first
A better claim to my good faith were his.
Where trust is not, there treachery cannot be.
Were but the Count as quick to apprehend
My leaning to his side, as long has been
My father to suspect my falling off,
We had ere this been better understood
Each of the other. He shall know me now.

Enter COMNENUS.

Enough, Count Isaac, rise; you still forget
The well-deserved exemption you enjoy
From all except the first prostration.

Comnenus. Ah!
Great is my privilege in Byzantium!
In truth, to stand upon two legs at court
Is what is not infrequently forgotten.

Theodora. But tell me, Count—we should have met ere this—

Where have you been then?

Comnenus. Sleeping out the noon.

Theodora. Asleep?

Comnenus. Why wherefore not? Sleep, only sleep
Houses the fugitive; sleep shuts the door
Against the hour's too saucy creditors
And bids them rail unheeded and unheard;
Sleep bears the flag of truce to foreign foes;
Sleep stills intestine discord; what but sleep
Can separate the combatants within
Till Time and Death may meet and come to terms
And arbitrate the sole perpetual peace.

Theodora. Oh, it is no time for your race to sleep,
Unless it were indeed the sleep of death;
And there were tumults in the streets to-day
Might all but wake the dead.

Comnenus. So noisy were they?
'Tis true there was some shouting in the Forum;
It is a trick of the citizens; when it rains
And corn is mildew'd, straight we have a swarm
Of curious knaves will find us out the cause,
And having found, they noise it in the streets,
Which makes this outcry.

Theodora. Howsoever made
It might have kept you wakeful, for your name
Bore the chief part.

Comnenus. I verily believe it;
To-day am I the cause; to-morrow, you;

The next day, it may chance, your royal sire.
'Tis all hap-hazard.

Theodora. Truly think you so?
Then you think wrong; there is a hidden source
Of these dissensions: but I know not yet
What thanks or whether any should be mine
For confidence unsought.

Comnenus. Dismiss your doubts;
There are two values in a trust reposed;
The first, the knowledge from the trust derived;
The second, the goodwill of those who give it.
For so much as 'tis given in free goodwill
I value it.

Theodora. Supposing it so given,
What then to recompense this free goodwill
Would you adventure?

Comnenus. Oh, the infinite pain
Of hearing an interminable secret—
But not upon the instant unprepared,
For I must fast a month and pray to God.
Meantime I take my leave,—unless perchance
There's aught your Highness would command me in?

Theodora. You came at leisure—why this haste to go?
s the escaping from my confidence
A matter so immediate?—Thankless friend!

Comnenus. There you misjudge me: for the warning given
You have my thanks; for what remains behind

I can surmise its import to this length,
That 'tis intelligence more dangerous
For you to give than me thus warned to want.
I am content: that I am thankful too
Time may prove or may not: 'tis true the same.
So fare you well.

Theodora. For my sake speak you thus?
Oh, if my peace you tender,—ay, or my life,
Know whence the dangers come that threaten them.
I am an Emperor's daughter, but my heart,
Imperial if it be, is womanly:
One arrow is there and one poisoned cup
I have to dread—Oh! turn but them aside
And lightly as yourself will I defy
All else that can assail me; whilst for you
My woman's wit should weave a panoply
That nothing could transpierce:—turn them aside
And let our counsels be of one accord
And we will share the issue.

Comnenus. That can we never.
Nature has set apart our destinies
And each must follow out the course assigned;
I mindful of this token of goodwill,
Nor you regardless of your household ties.

Theodora. Talk you of Nature? Well, then, hear my creed.
The strongest ties have Nature's strongest sanction,
And if the ties of blood be *not* the strongest

Nature doth abrogate and make them void.

Comnenus. Where these are not the strongest which are they
That are not frail?

Theodora. Most moral Sophist! Say
That there were sin, the burden of my sins
Is on my conscience, none of it on yours;
Then whom concerns it?

Comnenus. Happy is the man
Who, unpartaking of the evil thing,
Reaps the full harvest of another's sins.
But then what says the casuist?——

Theodora. What he says
This is no time to tell. What profits it
Thus to make answer in didactic vein
To overtures like mine? 'Tis fit you know
They touch on life and death. This (learn from me)
Is not the time to ponder and to poise,
But with a resolute mind to choose your part.

Comnenus. Thanks for the words of wisdom! excellent
And profitable counsel had this been
Were it not that—one melancholy night—
So long ago that I but then reposed
From my triumphal honours—on this night—
Lying awake through indigestion caught
At the Imperial board—my part was chosen.

Theodora. Then act your part—a rash and obstinate part
And like to prove a tragical—act your part;

Your life is in my hands ; a few words less
And it had there been safe—but do your will—
Rush headlong to your ruin—I should have known
That never was there a Comnenus yet
Who would take part with any but his kin
Or counsel save of pride that courts a fall
And plays at dice with Fate.

Comnenus. If so it be,—
If it be true mine ancestry and kin
Have all so stubbornly maintained this course,
It were presumption in my humble self
To wander from their ways. But rest assured
If nature made us not for facile friends
We are not easily made enemies
Nor eager in ill-will. So peace be with you.

[*Exit.*

Theodora. Great God ! preserve my heart from breaking yet
And grant me strength to stagger through the world
Till I have struck a blow. But can it be?
No, he will not be stubborn to the last;
'Tis but his pride, and when his power runs low
That feeds it, he will turn to me. If not
He'll have an enemy more dangerous
Than all that now surround him. Who are you?

Enter a Domestic.

Domestic. His sacred Majesty commanded me

To ask if yet your Highness was at leisure
And could attend him?

Theodora. Tell him that I come.

[*Exit* Domestic.

That is a sleuth-hound sent to pry about
And watch my motions. Ay; the time is past
For putting trust in me.

SCENE III.—*Streets of Constantinople.—A crowd of* Monks, Acolytes, *and* Citizens *of the blue faction.*

1st Citizen. Patience, fellow-citizens, I say patience. Let us all be patient; let us all be patient.

1st Monk. I say he is an Iconoclast.

2nd Citizen. Iconoclast! I know not what is Iconoclast! but this I know,—there's no man ever wore a green scarf but deserved hanging in it.

1st Monk. I tell thee he is an Iconoclast if ever one of his house was. Did he not break the head of the holy St. Basil (whose name be glorified!) with the butt end of his lance?

2nd Monk. I say Anathema, I say Anathema, I say Anathema. Body and soul, life and limb, here and hereafter . . .

Monks and Acolytes. Anathema esto, Anathema.

1st Citizen. Patience, excellent friends and fellow-citizens! I say let us debate this matter as wise men with patience and silence.

2nd Monk. I say,—body and soul, life and limb, here and hereafter, be he cursed.

3rd Citizen. Then to hell with him at once.

2nd Citizen. Most assuredly, holy father, he shall go to hell.

1st Citizen. Patience, sweet friends; silence, gentle countrymen; patience and silence, I say. I am about to explain this matter to you.

2nd Citizen. Why all this clamour? Silence, and hear the worthy Hypatius.

3rd Citizen. Silence! Why roar and growl ye thus like the bears in the Hippodrome?

1st Citizen. Hem!—We are all agreed in one thing,—that Count Comnenus is to be made an end of.

2nd Citizen. All, all.

3rd Citizen. Agreed, agreed.

1st Citizen. Then having come to the conclusion, which is with us as it were the ground and beginning of the argument, it behoves us to look to the reasons, which are, as I may say, the ways and means of coming to the conclusion. For if you fall to without knowing the reasons, you'll be held for no better than brute beasts; since all your wise men, look ye, when they are resolved upon a thing, have ever sought out the reasons before they began. Now you all know that last year's harvest in Cappadocia was scarce worth the ingathering, and that corn here in Constantinople cannot be had for money. And who is the cause of this, think ye?

All. Comnenus, Comnenus.

1st Citizen. And that the Huns and Bulgarians and other such long-haired savages carried fire and sword and bows and arrows and long spear and short spear through the heart, and, as I may say, to the very neck and heels of the Chersonese, and looked a very terrible look at us over the long wall.—And who brought all this about, think ye?

All. Comnenus, Comnenus.

1st Citizen. But how did Comnenus bring it about, answer me that?—You're dumb,—you know not. Now hear me. You all know that some years by-gone this Comnenus was out in the Persian war, fighting in as Christian-like a manner as I myself or any of you. Now mark;—after he was taken prisoner, there comes to him in his tent one evening an old man, wrapped in a flowing mantle, and holding, look ye, a cup in one hand and a mighty volume in the other. He was as wicked a Magian as you shall see in all Persia; and he said to him, look ye, he said . . . by the sweat of St. Isidore I have forgotten what he said. But ever since, this Comnenus has been one of your bloody schismatics and heretical murdering villains.

All. We know it. We know it.

1st Citizen. Ay, and you know too the holy image of the blessed St. Basil, in the niche over the monks of St. Conon's gate. Now this Comnenus, no farther back than one night I know not when, riding past like a

madman with two or three more such heathen pagan knights from over-sea, puts me his lance in the rest with the butt end to the onset, and drives it two inches and a half into St. Basil's eye.

2nd Monk. Anathema esto!

All. Anathema!

1st Citizen. Softly! you all know that St. Basil is the Patron Saint of this city; now the case stands here;—will he ever look evenly on this city again?

All. Never, never.

1st Citizen. Never while Comnenus is in it.

Citizens. We'll drag him out of it, we'll burn him alive.

1st Citizen. But they'll tell you, they of the green faction, that he's a very Socrates, a second Cæsar, and holds your clubs are no better than oaten straws and will not frighten the flies from lighting on your noses. But mark you this—Did Cæsar ever consort with the Magians? Did Cæsar ever hit St. Basil in the eye?

Citizens. No, no.

1st Citizen. And though I think he be neither a saint nor a martyr, yet I'll be bound for him he was no blood-thirsty heretic. Why then, if Cæsar was no heretic, a heretic can be no Cæsar. And look ye,—what I say is this,—shall all Constantinople be starved to death because of one man?

All. Never, never. Burn his house. Cut his throat.

1st Citizen. Then look ye, what I say is this,—if he be not already fled forth the city gates——

Citizens. Stop him, seize him, secure the gates.

2nd Monk. Smite him hip and thigh, hew him in pieces before the Lord.

Enter a Eunuch *of the Palace.*

Eunuch. Why do ye flourish your staves in the air, good friends? Worthy father, why dost thou ventilate thy garment in the east wind? Whom seek ye?

All. Comnenus, Comnenus.

Eunuch. Then your search is not like to be long, for I came before him but half the street's length.

1st Citizen. Count Comnenus, saidst thou! How attended?

Eunuch. There is a young officer from the eastern army with him.

2nd Citizen. Armed, armed, saidst thou?

Eunuch. Ay, short sword and shirt of mail.

1st Citizen. Fall on him, down with them both! I'll run and make sure of the east gate, lest he make his escape.

2nd Citizen. And I the north.

3rd Citizen. And I the south.

[*Exeunt all but* Fourth *and* Fifth Citizens.

4th Citizen. Lo you! how they run! to my thinking they are no better than arrant cowards.

5th Citizen. Assuredly they have the gift of running. But if we stay here alone we're dead men.

4th Citizen. No question of it,—dead.

5th Citizen. Come along; they say this Comnenus is sworn friend and minister to the Devil. I tell thee Satan took his Bible-oath to back him out in aught he put his hand to.

4th Citizen. I would go, but that it looks so villanous dastardly.

5th Citizen. Do as thou wilt. Fare thee well!

[*Exit.*

Enter COMNENUS *and an* Officer *of the Eastern Army.*

Comnenus. One whom my brother . . .
. . . What dost stand i' the way for, friend?

4th Citizen. Nothing, worthy Sir—good day, noble Count.

[*Exit.*

Comnenus. One whom my brother holds in trust, to me
Is as a brother welcome. More than once
I wrote to beg him, should he come at all,
To come with what celerity he might;
But he outstrips my expectation. Speed,
'Tis true, is needful; you yourself may see
The state in which I stand; no day goes by
But fills the streets with tumult; even now
Methought I saw a flying rack of the storm
Scud by to leeward. Say, what think you, Sir?

Officer. My Lord, for those that I have seen, they seem
The very scum of the city and dregs of the Church.

Comnenus. Why so they are—yet these things have their source.

You are a soldier, Sir,—ay, and a young one;
You would instruct me—for a soldier's dawn
Is rich in lights and guidance—you would call
These gatherings here and there that rise and break
And vanish, worthier of the city watch
With whip in hand, than of a soldier's sword.
Sir, if these slight imposthumes which you see
Were the disease, not, as they are, the symptoms,
Think you I'd send so far to have them lanced?
This multitude, this monster idiot-born,
Moves you not one of its Briarean hands
By its own brainless head; but let some chief,
Though he be ne'er so base, but whoop them on
And they shall follow till the noblest fall.
Your master must be nearer ere I move.
You left him at Ancyra?

Officer. There, my Lord,
He waits your further tidings, or will move
His somewhat jaded force more gently on.

Comnenus. 'Twere good he came no further or came fast.

I wrote with some caution, Sir; I'll speak with less;
Well knowing whom my brother trusts trustworthy.
Tell him that in my mind the time of choice
Has slidden from our grasp; tell him that now
Our only armour is the crown and purple.

Here stands the throne, and there the block—I say
To one of these must the Comneni come:
Suspicion thus draws down the thing it fears
And emperors leave no refuge save in empire.
This thou shalt tell my brother is my mind.
Say further thus:
If having duly weighed the double venture
He hold forbearance for the lighter risk,
Let him lead back his forces (for myself
I'd put the issue on a throw of the dice
As lief as on aught else); but so he view
These matters as I view them, let him on
With all the speed his lightest horse can make
To the Propontis on the hither shore,
And, barring accidents, I'll meet him there;
And you, Sir, too, I hope.

Officer. I'll use all speed.

Comnenus. When past the city gates;
Till then go leisurely and unobserved.
I've noted when I send young gallants forth
In things of trust and moment, straight they'll lash
Their horses in a gallop through the street,
That Mother Gape may ope her casement wide
And Father Quidnunc stare. Take heed of this.
Use all despatch, not as to boast great things
Are staked upon thy speed, but so to join
Despatch with privacy as the stake's on both.
Deem that this trust is for the empire's weal

And not to do thee credit. Fare thee well.

[*Exit* Officer.

He's a young envoy in a cause like this.
Alexius has the gifts that quicken zeal
In them that serve him, but he hardly knows
What harness it should wear or whither speed.

SCENE IV.—*An Apartment in a Convent near St. Conon's Shrine.*

EUDOCIA *and* ANNA COMNENA.

Eudocia. I never knew but all of us were brave.
In tears! I'll not believe you of our race.

Anna. Oh! were I not I were not weeping now.
Heaven knows it is not for myself.

Eudocia. Why there!
That were the least unreasonable cause.
Is it my brother that you weep for? He
Is nothing new to dangers nor to life.
His thirty years on him have nigh told double,
Being doubly laden with the unlightsome stuff
That life is made of. I have often thought
How Nature cheats this world in keeping count:
Some men shall pass for old who never lived;
These monks, to wit; they count the time, not spend it;
They reckon moments by the tick of beads

And ring the hours with psalmody—clocks, clocks;
If one of these had gone a century
I would not say he'd lived. My brother's age
Hath spanned the matter of too many lives;
He's full of years, though young: ne'er weep for him.

Anna. He looks not tired of life.

Eudocia. Not when with you.
There is a sort of youth comes back on men
By sight of childhood. It is so with him;
At least by sight of you.

Anna. But others, too,
Call him a cheerful man.

Eudocia. They know him not.
You knew him not in earlier youth; and I
Can scarce believe that it was he I knew.
The false vivacity of fevered blood
Under the press and spur of times like these
Deceives not me; nor yet the power he hath
Of holding off the burthen of his mind
Till the time come that leaves him to himself.
Disquieting thought hath wasted him within.
Weep for Alexius, if weep you must;
His seems a life worth saving; he is now
Much what some ten years past his brother was,
Yet may be what he is. Let Fate alone;
There's many a man is best cut off betimes.
Date not their destinies.

Anna. You love them not,

Though you're their sister, as their cousin loves them.

Eudocia. I would not have them walk in the dusk like thieves,
Nor crouch like chidden slaves, nor dig them holes
And hide like Troglodytes. I'd have them live
Even as their sires of old, linked each with each;
Careless of kingdoms so they might live free;
If not, I'd have them Kings.

Anna. Alas! and I
Would count it no mischance that sent us back
To our Propontic island, where we all
Were born and bred in peace, who now are strewn
Like a wrecked convoy on a savage coast.

Eudocia. Hush! Prophetess of woe; the ships sail well,
Though they be deep in the water.

Enter COMNENUS.

Here are we,
Obedient to your summons; both in doubt,
And one in dread, of what may be the cause.
Why have you sent us hither?

Comnenus. Need I say,
Eudocia, that it never was my wont
To clip and pare ill tidings for your ear.
The city is no longer safe for you:
Therefore I sent you hither.

Anna. And yourself?

Comnenus. My safety will be cared for in due course.

Anna. And stay you with us, then?

Eudocia. No! by my faith;
That question *I* can answer. We seek here,
If I misjudge not, the good neighbourhood
Of Mother Church's sanctuary.

Anna. And he?

Eudocia. Think you the sanctuary's a place for him?

Comnenus. I have a safer refuge. Mother Church
Hath no such holy precinct that my blood
Would not redeem all sin and sacrilege
Of slaughter therewithin. But there's a spot
Within the circle my good sword describes
Which by God's grace is sanctified for me.

Eudocia. Yet do not be so rash to walk the streets
Without a guard.

Anna. Are not the riots quelled?

Comnenus. They are not: they increase and will increase
Until the cause be quelled.

Anna. What is the cause?

Comnenus. There are, if truth were known, some three or four;
But one is named.

Eudocia. And what may be its name?

Comnenus. Truly they call it by my name, Comnenus.

Eudocia. Then they miscall it.

Comnenus. No, not altogether.

When things of evil aspect are to do
The first cause is not named, but commonly
Some slight, remote, co-operative cause,
Whereto the people knit them soul and body
Unknowing that which stirs them up to act,
Which is the mover's cause, not multitude's.
The mover finds them reasons, they him hands.

Eudocia. Whence hath he then these reasons?

Comnenus. Oh! they grow wild.
He is an arrant bungler in his work,
Whate'er it be, who is not stored with reasons.
Reasons! there's nought in life so plentiful!
They are the most besetting snares of men
Who ought to act by instinct, did they but know
How far their nature, when not tampered with,
Their prostituted reason would transcend.

Eudocia. But how are you the cause?

Comnenus. The multitude
Were ready for a cause—and there was I.
There's much sedition in the gastric juice
Gnawing the empty coats of poor men's stomachs.

Eudocia. This tells me nothing: prithee to the point.

Comnenus. What would you have?

Eudocia. I'd have you signify
What is our hope, what ought to be our aim,
What's to be feared, what to be done . . . .

Comnenus. Ay—true;
I never knew a woman placed in peril

But must be doing; if not dead despair,
Then fever'd action :—Muse, Eudocia,
Muse, meditate, and moralize like me.
That which I crave of you is quietness.
You would intrust me with your safety, Anna?

Anna. Truly I would not trust you with your own,
So I could find you a more careful guard;
But as for mine I'd trust it with a foe.

Comnenus. Where would you find one?

Anna. Oh! it were easy, that;
Foes are as plentiful as lukewarm friends.

Eudocia. Why, Anna, can your tongue too play the censor!

Comnenus. My cousin, may you ne'er have cause to prove
The fervour of your friends.—Hark! there's the bell:
Is it for vespers?

Anna. It is evensong.

Comnenus. And you attend it?—tell the Abbess then
That I detain my sister—has she leave?

Eudocia. Ay, say so, cousin.

[*Exit* ANNA.

Comnenus. My time is short; but something must be told
Which 'twere as well she heard not. Why it is
I know not (for the thing must come to her
As to all else in time), but I would not
Disclose to her—no, not a thousandth part—

The knowledge which to me, though loth to learn,
My dealings with this treacherous world have taught.
Eudocia. And what has happened now?
Comnenus. A summons came
From Theodora: I attended her,
And found her ready to betray her father.
Eudocia. She is more passionate than politic,
Yet lacks not cunning: she has then despaired
Of winning you by fairer means?
Comnenus. And these
Have failed her likewise: I refused her suit.
Eudocia. But not her tidings?
Comnenus. I refused them too.
It went against my nature to accept them.
I am prepared for whatsoe'er befalls,
Or shall be on the morn. Provision's made
Where it may be adventured here within.
To-morrow night, so that his purpose hold,
Alexius may be looked for. You, from hence,
Can, at a word of warning, reach the shrine;
There wait in safety the result: if ill,
To you, Eudocia, I need not say
How ruin should be met.
Eudocia. If it be well,
Then no instructor will my brother need
How he should wear the diadem.
Comnenus. Enough.
That's as it may fall out. My brows, in sooth,

Would rather bare them to the breath of heaven
Than be so gold-encircled : yet 'tis true,
I shall need no instructor. It grows late.
I think I have said all. Farewell, farewell.
Should it be long ere we two meet again,
Yet is it not for us to chide the Fates,
Or make long partings.

Eudocia. One word more, but one ;—
Last night I heard strange stories of a feast
To which you bade your friends: it is not true?

Comnenus. It makes for me that it should pass for true.
'Twas a Damoclean feast and we sat down
In flowing robes with corslets underneath ;
And I may say I ne'er saw graver guests
Met to carouse, save at the royal board,
Where memory evocates imperial deeds
Such as betrayed Britannicus of old.
Another such has waited me too long.
Be strong of heart—be like yourself.—Farewell.

[*Exit.*

Eudocia. And I could say to you "Be strong of heart,"
But that were needless ; and "Be like yourself"
Were an injunction I would qualify.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Palace of the Cæsars.*

Nicephorus. Priests are even all but Kings, and would be Kings
But that the diadem disdains bald crowns.
That snake engendered amid Rome's green ruins,
The inheritor of Satan's pomp and pride,
At whose fierce hiss the royal Henry shook
An Emperor excommunicate, and bowed
His haughty spirit, after three days' fast,
To walk barefooted to Canusio's gates
Most abject in submission—that proud priest
Is imitated here: but I can spurn
Their interdicts, and call my crown my own,
Seeing their schism doth comminute their power.
Is no one there? What, Corius! Lazer! Ho!

Enter Attendant.

Comes not our reverend Lord the Patriarch yet?

Attendant. Not yet, my Liege.

Nicephorus. Ha! what hast got beneath thine upper vest?
Here, here; 'tis steel!

Attendant. The star you bade me wear.

Nicephorus. Ay, true—the star—thou hast deserved it well.

The Patriarch, as I think, is past his hour;
The moon should rise at eight and we should see her
But that the horizon's cloudy; yon's her light;
What says the Persian water-clock? How now!
There's dust upon thy sandals! where hast been?

Attendant. You sent me for my Lord the Patriarch, Sire.

Nicephorus. Ay, true, 'twas thou; a trusty knave thou art.

What's doing in the streets?

Attendant. Sire, here and there
The people gather and invoke the death
Of Count Comnenus and reproach his house
For all the ills they suffer.

Nicephorus. Why, so let them.
What, saw'st thou nought of the other faction, ha?

Attendant. My Liege, there's none can see them; they're so few
And cowardly they dare not venture forth.

Nicephorus. Well: let me know the hour.

[*Exit* Attendant.

They may be few,
But whether cowardly demands a doubt.
There never was a kingdom but comprised
Some thousands of bold men that hate the King,

Whom in some kingdoms there are none to love;
And of these thousands one life sacrificed
In killing of this King would quench the hate,
The smouldering hate that burns these bosoms black.
Now, it is strange that men hang, burn, and drown
For love, religion, pride, I know not what,—
Cast away life for very wantonness,—
Yet of these thousands you shall not find one
Will dare an instant death and slay the King.
And through the lack of this one instrument
Innocuous malice lies a coiled-up snake
Through life till toothless age. What threatens me
Is not a general hatred; 'tis the growth
Which year by year a lengthened puissance breeds
Of checked ambition and exasperate will;
For who reigns long must needs wear out the hopes
And baulk the aims of many. Yet are these
By prosperous suitors shackled . . .

Enter Attendant.

Attendant. Please my Liege,
The Patriarch has arrived.
Nicephorus. At last. Admit him.
And some are yet more hated than they hate;
Careless withal, incautious, eating, drinking,
Sporting and sleeping like a Goth or Frank
After a victory. Then why this fear?

Here is the Church too, glad to change with me
And hug my burthen. Be it so! Amen!
For Kings should never seem to be men's foes,
There being always some to take that part
Whose malice, seeming to be bridled in,
Is spurred the while and chafes with neck high-arched,
Till, once let go, it gallops to its goal,
And hath the scandal for its guerdon fair.
Thus with this headstrong priest, in extreme age
Fiercer and fierier——

Enter Patriarch.

Most reverend Lord,
We give you hearty welcome.

Patriarch. May the host
Of heaven in all good thoughts preserve the King!

Nicephorus. I sent for you through pressure of some ills
That weigh but heavily on ourself and state.
How is't, my Lord, that in our sovereign seat
We cannot rest in peace for slaves and monks
Careering through the streets from morn till night?

Patriarch. How is it, say you, Sire? Why thus it is,
Yea, thus it is; the sovereign arm is weak,
The sovereign heart is palsied, and the Church,
Reft of her strength thereby, is trampled down.
How is it? look abroad—Time, crippled sore,

Hath lost his footing and slid back three ages.
Behold! the spirit of Isaurian Leo,
Accursed heresiarch! is forth and fighting.

Nicephorus. Ay, ay, my Lord, since first she found a voice
In Paul of Tarsus, still the Church hath cried
That heresies are growing; yet she thrives
From age to age, till crowns but hang on crosiers.

Patriarch. Yea, doth she thrive? and from her very walls
The images of her most glorious saints
Down shivered into shards; her ministers
By every uncommunicating slave
Laughed unto scorn! yea, thriving call you this?
Then take thou heed, for by the bones of Basil
The Empire and the Church shall thrive alike.

Nicephorus. Be temperate, priest.

Patriarch. I tell thee, monarch, when the crosier bends,
The sceptre breaks; and I will tell thee more;
'Twere better for thy temples to have worn
The iron crown in Lombardy, than here
Thy golden diadem and tarnished thus.

Nicephorus. What wouldst thou have? Truly 'tis aid I need,
Not admonition. Seek I not an end
To all these troubles, or did *I* begin them?
Or can I with a heartier will consult

For compassing their cure?

Patriarch. 'Tis well, my Liege;
The Church shall aid with her maternal arm,
Propping her aged servant at his task.
I am gone in years, my Liege, am very old,
Coreless and sapless, weak, and needs must crave
Support of secular force, else had this sore
Not grown upon us thus. It is not well
When that the Church and State divide their power
And carp upon the difference. In my youth
I can remember, old as I may be,
I sojourned at the convent of St. Anne
In the Hercynian forest; and one night
There was a storm abroad, and forth I went
Along with it, and roaming through the wood
I saw an aged oak which groaned and creaked
And flung its arms aloft, whereof the nearest
Ground each into the other till both fell
Sawn thorough sheer; and this I likened then
To Nebuchadnezzar's tree of monarchy——
But I am wandering; 'tis mine age's weakness.

Nicephorus. I grant you, holy father, that for us
To be at strife, is but for each to waste
The strength that each hath need of. But the Church,
The Church it is Count Isaac hath assailed,
And if her champions strike not, how should I?

Patriarch. Speak but the word, the blow shall follow fast.

I will abet your majesty in all,
So it be sudden. Whatsoe'er is feared
In states is dangerous. The man is bold,
His friends are many, and it were not safe
That warning went before.
Nicephorus. Yes, more than bold.
There is in him a carelessness of life
Which ofttimes betters care.
Patriarch. In him I grant;
Not in his friends and followers. All they have
Of courage falters seeing him removed.
Nicephorus. Removed—removed; but how?
Patriarch. With gracious speed
And godly prudence; swift and therefore sure.
Let but a whisper of a threat be heard
And you shall see him desperate and his friends
By very fear compacted and compelled
To follow where his frenzied boldness bids.
Who then shall answer for the issue?
Nicephorus. Well
What wouldst thou counsel—exile? interdict?
Patriarch. Commit him to the power of Mother Church;
Call we a Synod, cite we the Count forthwith
To answer for his sacrilege.
Nicephorus. What! now?
Patriarch. Now, now, I say; the time is fitting; thus
Surprise shall bar resistance or escape.

The measure of his wickedness filled full
We take him in the surfeit of his sins—
The deadly surfeit and the doom.
Nicephorus. So, so;
'Tis sudden, but I hardly may deny
That ofttimes what is sudden is more safe
Than what is slow. Thy counsel shall be mine,
And may God speed it!
Patriarch. That He surely shall.
Despatch a guard; arrest the Count; meanwhile
A Synod shall be summoned.
Nicephorus. And the award?
What dost thou purpose?
Patriarch. That is for the Church
Assembled to adjudge: the sinner thou
Deliverest to her hands; the rest is hers;
And she will purge her sanctuary.
Nicephorus. 'Tis just.
Yet bear in mind that nothing has been proved
Of treasonable sort, and lacking proof,
I burthen not my conscience with his blood;
Nor of his following, till their guilt be clear,
Would I take life too hastily.
Patriarch. My Liege,
Know you not there are maladies in men
Which in their rise were easy to be cured
Were they but known; whereof when clear become
The diagnostics, difficult is the cure.

For treason timely treatment: be content:
This is an issue that concerns the Church,
Which sleeps not and will take her torch in hand.

Nicephorus. Order it so. My crown these last few years
Hath pressed some furrows in my brow which else
Time had been tardier with. It lightens me
To have a friend like thee, in whom I trust.

Patriarch. God have your majesty in His safe keeping!
An hour will bring us hither.

Nicephorus. In an hour
The culprit shall attend you! God be with thee!

SCENE II.—*The Palace of the Comneni. The board spread as for a feast.* MACRINUS, NUMERIAN, *and others.* Leaders *and* Soldiers *of the faction dressed as revellers, musicians, attendants, etc. Arms appear occasionally underneath the dresses.*

Enter COMNENUS.

Comnenus. What! friends, the board is spread, and ye abide
The coming of the host? Much grieved is he
His noble guests should wait. But how is this?
Rich smell the viands; whence these grave regards?

Macrinus. My Lord, we have not all the art, like you,
To cast aside perplexities and cares:

But though our looks be grave, our hearts are staunch.

Comnenus. Well, then we'll all be grave. Be seated, friends:

But pledge me first in this; 'tis Samian wine,
And of the innermost; it quickens counsel,
And makes it bolder, which with us is better.
Your toast, Sir; you are practised much in toasts.

Numerian. I am, Sir, and in things of more concern.
"The double dyeing of the royal purple."

Comnenus. I pledge not that: we're drinking wine, not blood.

Success to *us*: say nothing of the rest.

[*They drink.*

My Lord Macrinus—to the head of the board;
I shall be but a listener.

Macrinus. Sir, I thank you;
But there are worthier of that place than I.

Comnenus. None, none, Macrinus, that I know of, none;
And if there be they'll pardon me the choice.
Sit close about the board and speak not loud.

[*They sit.*

When we brake off last night, Sirs, I remember
We had some difference as to modes and times.
You said, Sir, as I think——

1*st Leader.* My Lord, my thought
Was humbly this; that could we seize some post
Within the walls, 'twould profit more our cause;

Since flight doth alway with the vulgar sort
Give token of defeat or loss, and thence
Their spirits swell with triumph.
2nd Leader. But, my Lord,
In my mind it were good they do thus swell;
For as despair may oft avert men's ruin,
So causeless exultation brings it on;
The one emboldening reason, the other folly.
3rd Leader. Besides, supposing we could win this post,
'Twould make the times of action cross; for look,—
Wait we your brother's coming, we're too late;
The news is theirs as soon as ours; not wait,
And should he be delayed, we're premature;
For you'll observe, my Lord . . .
Comnenus. Enough, enough;
I see your point, Sir, and I hold it good.
1st Leader. Yet, Sir, there are some reasons we o'erlook . . .
Comnenus. There are, Sir, many; which I overpass,
Not wholly overlook; for should I stop
To weigh the grains of reason one by one
We are to gather and glance o'er, good Sir,
'Twould hold us here till morning; not to add,
That so we multiply the chance of error.
We'll hold this matter, with your leave, arranged.
1st Leader. My Lord, you would not pass Numerian's toast,
Yet would I deem it over-lenity

To spare another's blood and stake our own.
One death or ere the strife began, my Lord,
Might save some thousands.

Comnenus. But not salve the sin.
My friends, God knows too lenient am I not,
And to my nature 'tis less opposite
To be the cause whereby a thousand bleed
Than purposely kill one to save the rest;
And there is reason for it, howe'er we gloze.
This once for all, him hold I a false friend,
(Which signifies I hold him worse than foe,)
Who strikes at any life save in fair fight.

Enter Attendant.

Attendant. Sir, there's one waiting at the gate to see you.

Comnenus. One,—what one, who?

Attendant. I know not, Sir; he's muffled in his cloak,
In fashion more a Latin than a Greek.

Comnenus. My friends, await me there within.

Macrinus. You're armed?

Comnenus. From head to foot.

[*They withdraw.*

Enter THEODORA.

Comnenus. When I shall know my guest to be a friend,
I'll give him welcome.

Theodora. You may give it then.

[*Discovering herself.*

You might have known her for a friend long since,
She proffers you but one proof more.

[*Giving her hand.*

Comnenus. A fair one.

Theodora. You well may wonder, and I think you do,
Although you show it not.

Comnenus. Not much; not much;
Ten years are gone since I have felt surprise
Save at my own existence and the stars.

Theodora. If not surprise, what else then can you feel?
Oh Count, I ask it not in bitterness,
But can you see me here, almost, I own,
A supplicant—me, me a supplicant—
A woman and a princess at thy feet
Beseeching thee——

Comnenus. Oh, say no more—stop there.

Theodora. Beseeching thee to save thyself and me,
And feel nor pity, gratitude, nor love?
Thy life thou scarce canst deem so little worth
As I do mine; but it is worse than death
To bear a dead heart in a living body;
And when I tell thee death is at thy door,
The doom pronounced, the warrant out, the axe
Already in the headsman's hand, I say
Not only fly from death, but waken life
In thy dead heart. Be but a living man
And we will fly together.

Comnenus. Princess, no—

It cannot be; but yet misjudge me not;
I am not reckless, as you think, of life;
I am not thankless, as you think, for love:
Your countrymen, the Thracians, held of old
Their counsels o'er their cups in night carouse,
Perpending them next morn: even such has been
My session of to-night. My head, I think,
Will keep the headsman waiting. For my heart,
It is a sad and solitary heart,—
So sad that it must needs be solitary,—
And though not dead, disordered unto death,
And though not thankless, pitiless, or proud,
Yet inaccessible to love.

Theodora. Then, Count,
Know that I hold thy head from this time forth
As worthless as thy heart—and weak and fond
And tender as I would have been and was,
Or e'er these drops are dried upon my cheek
I'll see it rolling bloodily in the dust
With triumph and with joy. Till then, farewell.

Comnenus. It is but in thy passion and thy heat
Thou speak'st so wilderedly.

Enter Attendants.

1st Attendant. My Lord——

2nd Attendant. My Lord——

Comnenus. Soft! see you not this lady? One at once.

1st Attendant. Sir, the Varangian guard is at the gate,
With two officials of the Church.

Comnenus. What say they?

1st Attendant. They claim admittance on a royal writ,
Citing you to attend a Synod.

Comnenus. Good.
Admit them.

1st Attendant. What! the Churchmen, Sir?

Comnenus. Ay, all;
Open the gates; let all who will come in.
Thou staring idiot, do my bidding; go.

[*Exit* First Attendant.

Here, Porgius—thy wit runs deeper—hark!
When all are in, look that the gates be shut.

[*Exit* Second Attendant.

And, Macer, call Macrinus hither. See!

[*Exit* Third Attendant.

Your warning, Lady, would have come but late.

Enter MACRINUS.

Comnenus (*meeting and speaking aside to him*).
Macrinus, we have talked enough. Thou seest
The wordy time is past.

Macrinus. Indeed, my Lord,
This end was little looked for.

Comnenus. Not the less
I bid it welcome. They but give their hands

To fashion our devices. As they will.
Make speed, Macrinus, to the southern gate
With but such numbers as may make it sure
Yet not alarm the town; close by it stands
The cloister of St. Conon; send some friend
To bid my sister and my cousin there
Hie them to sanctuary. Within an hour,
If all be well, I mean to pass the gate.
That will not press you?

Macrinus. Ample time, my Lord.

Comnenus. Send Hertius round to draw our scattered friends
To the same spot,—within the hour. Till then
I will amuse the Emperor and his court.

Macrinus. But for these guards?

Comnenus. Hark! now they pass the gates.
When all are in, disarm and bind them. Yes,
They shall along with me, by their good leave.

[*Exit* MACRINUS.

Your father's action, Princess, with a bound
O'ertakes our tardy talk.

Theodora. So sudden! oh,
So madly sudden! Count, there still is time—
Say you recall the past—say you repent,—
And I may yet find means——

Comnenus. Nor now nor ever
Will I make bargains for a lady's love.

Enter Two Apparitors.

What is your errand, Sirs?—say on; no form.

1st Apparitor. Lord Count, our errand is to take thee hence
By virtue of this power.

Comnenus. Nay, keep the scroll;
Your tone's so lofty you must needs have powers.
But should I ask indulgence for an hour
To be prepared?

2nd Apparitor. My Lord, it cannot be.
The conclave waits.

Comnenus. Ay, doth it? then I come.
I pray you first to pledge me in this wine:
'Tis juice might soften Churchmen.

1st Apparitor. No, my Lord:
Our orders are to bear with no delay.

Comnenus. To bear with none!

[*A disturbance without.*

Oh! be at ease, Sirs: hark!
'Tis but disputes between my guards and yours
Which shall become my escort to the court.

Enter Attendant.

Attendant. My Lord, your orders are obeyed.

Comnenus. 'Tis well.

Confine these Churchmen in the cells below.

1st Apparitor. My Lord, beware how you maltreat the Church.

Comnenus. We leave them there, and on our march be sure
No voice be heard nor any leave their ranks.

1st Apparitor. I say, the thunders of the Church shall peal
Against this outrage——

2nd Apparitor. Hush! it will but goad him;
'Tis plain he's master.

Comnenus. Order thus the march:
The royal guard within, unarmed and bound,
My own surrounding them, myself will lead,—
This lady with me. Now, Sirs, we must part.
[*To the* Apparitors.
Keep your own secret: it is safe with me.
[*To* THEODORA.

1st Apparitor. Lord Count——

Comnenus. Nay, on, Sirs; you will suffer nought
Save mild restraint till morning.

2nd Apparitor. God be praised!

Comnenus (*to Theodora*). Give me your hand. Not so? then walk by me,
And doubt not my protection. You came here
In no such friendly guidance. There—[*As they go out*]—just so.
All as I wished, Macrinus: fling the gates wide,

And sound the trumpets of the Royal Guard.
Out, out, friends, out.

SCENE III.—*A Hall in the Palace, where many* Ecclesiastics *are assembled in Synod. The* Emperor *is seated on a throne at the further end of a table, at which are also seated the* Patriarch, *the* Bishop of Trebizond, *the* Bishop of Nicomedia, *the* Synodal Secretary, *and other* Dignitaries. *In front the* Bishops of Heraclea *and* Philippopolis *are conversing in an undertone and are joined by the* Bishop of Cæsarea.

Bishop of Heraclea. Methinks the time is long.

Bishop of Philippopolis. It passeth heavily, and truly 'tis heavy laden.

Bishop of Cæsarea. I heard our brother of Trebizond whispering the Patriarch of an idle rumour that the heretics were found watching and had overpowered the Royal Guard.

Bishop of Heraclea. At such times there are ever such rumours.

Bishop of Cæsarea. Hark !—no ; 'tis nothing. Is not the Emperor paler than his wont?

Bishop of Heraclea. He is as white as an almond tree in June.

Bishop of Cæsarea. And our brother of Trebizond?

Bishop of Heraclea. There's no more blood in his face than in this crucifix.

Patriarch. What is your talk, my Lords? Speak out, speak out: there be no laics here. Speak freely out.

Bishop of Cæsarea. Do thou make answer.

Bishop of Heraclea. Most holy father, we spake how that this heretic hath tarried long.

Patriarch. He cometh late to judgment; yea, too late.

Long-suffering are the delegates of heaven;
Abounding they in mercy and in grace:
So judgment followeth sin with stealing steps.
Too late—too late.

Emperor (*to one of the Ecclesiastics*). Send some one forth to look if they be coming.

[*Exit* Ecclesiastic.

Patriarch. I say we're all too late. Hast written out the award?

The Secretary. Holiest father, it is here.

Patriarch. We'll have it signed at once. First to his Majesty, and then the rest.

Emperor. Not me, not me; the thing concerns not me.

Patriarch. Well, well, here's warranty enough without.

[*Signs.*

So—pass it to my Lord of Trebizond.

Bishop of Trebizond. Must I sign first?

Patriarch. At once, my Lord, and pass it.

Bishop of Heraclea (*aside to the Bishop of Cæsarea*).
Mark you how the style trembles in his hand.

The Secretary. My Lord, you're writing on the written part:
The space is here.

Bishop of Trebizond. My eyesight fails me: here,—I see, I see.

Enter an Attendant.

Emperor. Thine errand?
We waive the adorations, speak thine errand.

Attendant. The Royal Guard is entering the gates.

Emperor. 'Tis well, right well.
Let them bring up the prisoner.

Patriarch. Bring him up.
Most reverend Lords, we pray you take your seats.

Enter another Attendant *in haste.*

Attendant. 'Tis not the Royal Guard; 'tis the Comnenians: they have passed the gates, Count Isaac at their head.

Emperor. Great God! then all is lost! Where is the Cæsarissa?

Bishop of Trebizond. We shall be murdered all!

Bishop of Cæsarea. We're martyrs doomed.

Bishop of Heraclea. Yea, verily the hour is come, and we are called and chosen.

[*During these exclamations the Hall has filled with* Officers of State *and* Attendants *crowding in confusedly.*

Patriarch. Silence, my Lords, what craven cries be these?
Your Majesty will please send some one forth
To draw your forces from the suburbs round.
I tell you take your seats. Ho! God is great!
His Church is mighty, and that might have we.
I say, bring up the Count.

Several voices. He's coming up.

Patriarch. I say, then, let him come.

Enter COMNENUS, *who walks to the foot of the table, the crowd falling back on either side.*

Comnenus. I'm here to answer to your summons.

Patriarch. Lo!
Almighty God is present in His Church!
His Church is present here!
How hast thou dared then to profane this presence
By coming here in arms? Give up thy sword.

[COMNENUS *ungirds his sword and flings it on the table.*

Comnenus (*after some pause*). What would ye have with it that cannot use it?
My Lords, you trifle with me; here am I
Brought by your midnight summons from my house,
And ye have nought to say. Ye do but mock me.

Patriarch. We mock thee not: 'tis thou that mock'st high Heaven.
Thou'rt summoned here on many an ugly count
Of sacrilege and heresy and schism,
Which so thou answer'st not and clear'st thy fame,
We shall, in due acquittance of our trust,
Pronounce the interdict from fire and water
And cut thee off from Christian fellowship.

Comnenus. My Lords, or e'er ye shall inhibit me,
From fire and water, have it you in charge
I cut not off yourselves from earth and air.
My Lords, this world is not so all your own
That ye can grant away the elements
Amongst your friends, and lock one moiety up
From them that like you not. Ye kneel and pray
That God will make you humble as the dust,
Then, rising, arrogate omnipotence
And shake the ashes from your shaven crowns.
But I ere long will teach you how to stoop
In veriest lowliness and know yourselves.

Patriarch (holds up the cross and pronounces the adjuration, "Ecce crucem Domini! fugite partes adversæ!")
A man possessed—'tis Sathan speaks, not he!
The father of lies hath spoken by his mouth.
An exorcist for this demoniac straight
To disenchant his body of the fiend!
Avaunt! avaunt!

Comnenus. Ay, echo cries "Avaunt!"

Ye charge your own malignancy on me.
A demonocracy of unclean spirits
Hath governed long these Synods of your Church,
The Antichrist foretold: and I am he
Who, in the fulness of the approaching time,
Will exorcise you all. Expect my coming.

[*Exit.*

[*A short silence ensues, during which several persons who had followed* COMNENUS *re-enter, exclaiming,* "The Count is gone!"

Patriarch. Thy wrath go with him, God!

Emperor. I hear the sound of horses' feet afar;
The city force is out—he cannot stay;
He will abscond and seek support abroad.
Let every tribune hie him to his charge.
The prefects and the eparchs will resort
To the Bucoleon with what speed they may,
And there I'll meet them. Each man to his charge.

Patriarch (*to the Bishops*). Soldiers of God and militants supern!
Fight the good fight! on us devolves the charge
To fulminate the judgments of the Church;
And on the morn, before Sophia's shrine,
Shall this high charge be solemnly fulfilled.
Let every Churchman now assembled here
Attend and share the office.—You may go.

SCENE IV.—*Precincts of the Palace.—A* Eunuch *of the Imperial Household and an* Exorcist.

Exorcist. He is gone, then?

Eunuch. Gone! he galloped out of the town as if he had ten thousand Devils in him.

Exorcist. Well, I am glad he is gone before I came, for to say the truth he is ill to deal with.

Eunuch. But thou couldst exorcise him?

Exorcist. Oh! if we come to the matter of science, an evil spirit is no more in one man than in another.

Eunuch. But tell me, I beseech thee, which saint is the most powerful for freeing the demoniacs?

Exorcist. That is, look you, according as they are obsessed or possessed; and also according to the order of the spirit: now for the abruption of evil spirits of Belphegor's or the ninth order, St. George of Cappadocia is your only saint. I have known him bring the Devil clean out of a man's body before ever he knew him to have been there.

Eunuch. Ay, indeed!

Exorcist. Yes; and you may remember Anthemius the Eparch, who was possessed of Leviathan and caused a dropsy in the Emperor's daughter. I never had a more obstinate spirit to deal with in all my experience.

Eunuch. But you succeeded?

Exorcist. I bless God, by the help of St. George, to say nothing of my own secret receipt for suffumigation,

I brought him fairly out at last, and her Highness was cured.

Eunuch. But did she not relapse in the space of a year or so.

Exorcist. Relapse? Yes, she did relapse; for, look you, there's nothing sneaks back into a man's body so soon as your villanous evil spirit.

Eunuch. But Anthemius has not troubled you lately?

Exorcist. No; the Emperor sent him to the prisons of Lethe on the other side of the water, and the word went he was strangled.

Eunuch. So he was, for certain.

Exorcist. What was it for, then?

Eunuch. Some idle tongues spake how that all was not as it should be between him and the Princess; but what plainly appeared against him was, that he stole the hood of a Benedictine Friar from his cell after eleven o'clock at night, and being afterwards at the Sabbath of evil spirits and magicians, did there put it upon Satan's head, saying, "hoc honore dignus es," in contempt of St. Benedict and his holy order.

Exorcist. God's mercy! it was time he was put out of the way! what will not a man do when once he is maleficated.

Eunuch. Ay; and who could bring him round without your help?—Come, we are friends, tell us some of the secrets of your craft.

Exorcist. There be things whereon we discourse to

our friends, and there be things whereon we hold our peace.

Eunuch. Nay but——

Exorcist. Mark me. There is an inside and an outside to everything. There is a virtue in silence, and that virtue is discretion, which is the virtue that holds a man back from babbling. Again—he that saith nothing doth wisely, for what he knows is more than you know.

Eunuch. By St. Peter that is true, and I will seek no further.

Exorcist. Nevertheless, as it is thou that hast inquired of me touching this matter, I will say somewhat; for the man that has nothing to say to his friend is too wise for this world.

Eunuch. Thou art a true friend to say so.

Exorcist. Attend then: when the demoniac is brought before you, the first thing is to make sure that he is *bonâ fide* possessed: for which end you shall look for the Devil's mark in the form of a hare's foot; and when you find it, run a lancet half an inch into the flesh; if the man cries out, it is a mere certainty he is possessed. The next thing is to bless the instruments, which are four; that is, water, incense, salt, and oil. Water is twofold; that is, first, water of ablution, and second, water of aspersion. Water of ablution is sevenfold; that is, first——

Eunuch. But tell us the manner of it.

Exorcist. The manners of it are three; there is the præexorcization, the exorcization, and the postexorcization. The præexorcizations are fifteen; that is——

Eunuch. Nay, I see it is past my understanding. But only tell me this,—how do you get the Devil out of a woman?

Exorcist. You've gravelled me there; if once the Devil gets into a woman——

Eunuch. But you told me but now, speaking of her Highness——

Exorcist. Why look you, the Devils that have to do with women are two,—the Incubi and Succubi; now for the Incubi——

[*Trumpets without.*

Eunuch. Hark! the troops are gathering; that is the Imperial march; they are coming this way: we must be gone.

Exorcist. I fear some bloodshed will come of this.

Eunuch. I care not what comes of it; nothing new to this city, we may be sure.

Exorcist. No, unless it were peace and quietness, which I much mistrust. Farewell; shame the Devil and renounce his works, and thou wilt never have need of my craft.

Eunuch. Easier to keep him out than to cast him out, if I know anything of it. Farewell.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The European Shore of the Propontic.*—ISAAC *and* ALEXIUS COMNENUS.

Alexius. But for that hair that's twisted in the grain
I had not known thee.

Comnenus. Youth, Alexius,
Knows nought of changes; age has traced them oft,
Expects, and can expound them. You yourself
Are somewhat altered, but the few years more
Of time which I have travelled through have taught
The art to know what has been from what is,
What's like to be from both: change is youth's wonder:
Such transmutations have I seen in men
That fortune seemed a slow and steadfast power
Compared with nature.

Alexius. There is nought you've seen
More altered than yourself.
I speak not of an outward change alone;
For you are changed in heart.

Comnenus. Ay, hearts change too:
Mine has grown sprightly, has it not, and hard?

I ride it now with spurs; else, else, Alexius—
Well, many a sage has said the best of life
Is childhood, and I sagely say the same.
Life is a banquet where the best's first served,
And when the guest is cloyed comes oil and garlic.

Alexius. Childhood! But later years went well, and gifts
Came with them that were better worth than joys.
Have you forgotten how it was your wont
To muse the hours away along this shore—
These very rippled sands?

Comnenus. The sands are here,
But not the footprints. Would you trace them now?
A thousand tides and storms have dashed them out;
Winds brushed them and waves worn them; and o'er all
The heavy foot of Time, who plods the shore
Replenishing his sand-glass, trodden down
Their vestiges and mine. Look, here's a rock—
His seat or e'er he pushed it from the cliff,
And which shall now be ours; a goodly seat;
He's worn it smooth—smooth as the fair round cheek
He lies in wait for, nor has touched with care
Nor stained with tears, nor even tutored yet
To dimple into lies.

Alexius. Look! what is here,—
Here, carved upon the rock?

Comnenus. That know not I,
But Time has ta'en it for a poet's scrawl—
He's razed it.

Alexius. No, not wholly; look again;
I take it for a lover's.

Comnenus. What! there's some talk
Of balmy breath, and hearts pierced through and through
With eyes' miraculous brightness, vows ne'er broken
Until the Church had sealed them, charms loved madly
Until it be a sin to love them not,
And kisses ever sweet till innocent.
How much that should be written in the stream
Has our fond lover written in the rock,
Not knowing of its nature?

Alexius. Hardly much;
Two words there are,—no more.

Comnenus. And what are they?

Alexius. "Alas, Irene!"—Why, your looks are now
Such as I once beheld them heretofore;
'Twas when our mother died;—what troubles you?

Comnenus. Now this I hate, to stand and be deciphered,
Pored on industriously and puzzled through
Like riddles that are read o' winter's nights
When maids and boys have nought to prate on else.
Alexius, forgive me. Leave me now.
There's business waiting for us both.

Alexius. Oh no;
I cannot leave you yet; there's yet to tell
A seven years' history since last we met.

Comnenus. Go put it down in four and twenty books
'Cleped "the Comneniad,"—to be read at leisure.

We'll have no more of this; my youth is past
And I would not recall it.
Alexius. Isaac, oh!
Can you stand here and say so? Can you look
On this soft-rolling, deep-embayed sea,
With yon blue beautiful ridge half-compassed round,—
Hear the low plash of wave o'erwhelming wave,
The loving lullaby of your mother Ocean,
(We, like the Cretan, are not sons of Earth,)—
See the rocks stand like nature's ruins round,
For man's were never so majestical—
The boundary forts of Earth and Ocean's empire,
The deep-scarred veterans of their countless wars,
Your native and your father's native shores—
Can you be so surrounded and speak thus!
Are they not lovely?
Comnenus. It is not the eye
To which these things seem lovely, but the mind,
Which makes, unmakes, remodels, or rejects.
When I was in the country whence you come,
I oft would watch the sun go down; and there
He sets with such refulgency of red,
That the whole east, with the reflected glow,
Is crimsoned as it may be here at dawn:
I would the life of man did so decline,
But that still darkens to the cloudy close.
Alexius. There is an after-dawn.
Comnenus. That way I look,

Or I have used to look, and that way turned
I turned my back upon the past. With you
It faces me again.

Alexius. We'll let it rest.
How is our cousin Anna?

Comnenus. Well, quite well:
The natural infirmities of youth,
Sadness and softness, hopefulness, wishfulness,
All pangs for which we do not see good cause
Let's take no count of. If at ninety years
A man shall die, accusing no disease,
Only by reason of the ninety years,
So shall a maiden languish at nineteen
Only by reason of the time and state.
Enough for nature if she keep us sound
In the slow tide and tenor of our lives,
Betwixt youth's flushings and the lapse of age.

Alexius. A rumour went our gentle cousin's charms
Were to have filled for you this gap of life.
If she grew up with what I call to mind
Of gifts that graced her childhood, few like her!

Comnenus. I own it, but I own it unenslaved.
I scarcely care for beauty.

Alexius. Have you nought
But that to care for? May we not say love?

Comnenus. That is a point to which most men would speak
In words of dubious import, to imply

That they are loved, but very loth to tell it.
I answer, Yes, she loves me.

Alexius. And you her?

Comnenus. Ay;—with a difference, though: her love's untold,
Though I am not so young in the world to doubt it;
I tell her that I love her every day.
I have designed her for a happier fate,
And she shall learn to love herself, not me;
Soon taught, soon taught.

Alexius. And wherefore not love both?

Comnenus. Because she never can be true to both.
Hast no talk meeter for a battle's eve?

Alexius. All is arranged; there's nought upon my mind.

Comnenus. Nor need there be; but there is much on mine,—
A weight of foregone years crowding along
That seem pressed back by some approaching close:
We'll talk of times to come to-morrow night.
What time the watch is set I take me hence:
I sleep beside Blachernæ.

Alexius. Do you so?
Is't not too near the walls?

Comnenus. I go alone.
One man at dusk will scarce be seen.

Alexius. Alone?
And take you not a guard then?

Comnenus. Not so far.
I have a watchful eye to yon monks' kennel;
For, as I said, if aught be stirring there
I'll seize upon the post by break of day.
Alexius. You fear not for our sister?
Comnenus. But thus far:
I think when Pagans such as we make war,
The safeguard of the Church is not so good
But that my own is better.
Alexius. Like enough.
My way is with you half the distance.
Comnenus. Well.
Macrinus then shall lead; we'll play the spy.
Let's to his tent; there must be orders given;
My armour too is there; ere all is done
Dusk will be well-nigh here and we'll set forth.

SCENE II.—*Evening.—An outpost of the camp. Tents in the distance. Fires at intervals, reaching to the shore and throwing light across the Propontic.* Soldiers *lying on their arms. In front a* Sentinel *walking his rounds.*

Sentinel. So, so! There is like to be wild work to-morrow, and as to what is to happen to me, it may be known or it may not. It was scarcely right and just a little venturesome of my wife, to betake herself to the

old wizard. Ah! after to-morrow never to walk more but with a wooden leg. Why, what then? My three-score and ten in this world is well-nigh out, and Father Jerome says a man may stump about in heaven with a wooden leg as stoutly as with the best.

Enter ALEXIUS.

Alexius. Thou art one of Count Isaac's men, art not?

Sentinel. How dost thou know that? Methinks by thy sunburnt face thou shouldst belong to my Lord Alexius.

Alexius. True, I am from the east; but we are comrades for all that.

Sentinel. Yes; for we are all Count Isaac's men now, mind'st thou.

Alexius. True.

Sentinel. Count Alexius is now no more than second in command.

Alexius. No more.

Sentinel. And in so small an army that is next to nothing.

Alexius. 'Tis little, but as much as he deserves.

Sentinel. Nay, I did not mean that: only I would have thee understand that thy master serves my master.

Alexius. He does. There are few men worthy to serve thy master. I would that Count Alexius were.

Sentinel. Not that I mean any ill of Count Alexius; he's young.

Alexius. Ay, but one might be wiser, even at his years.

Sentinel. Nay, I know not that. When I was two and twenty I know not if I had much more sense than he has now. 'Tis a miracle how sense will grow upon a man after he has mounted guard a few years. Thou wouldst not believe how many thoughts come and go in a wise man's head as he walks his four hours backwards and forwards upon an outpost.

Alexius. How long hast thou been walking here?

Sentinel. The matter of an hour.

Alexius. And what thoughts have come and gone in thy head?

Sentinel. The matter of four.

Alexius. What was thy first thought?

Sentinel. I bethought me that the wind was easterly and one ought to hear the waves break upon the Symplegades.

Alexius. What was thy second thought?

Sentinel. I thought when the moon rose I should see the tops of the fig-trees at Galatá; that's my birth-place.

Alexius. And thy third?

Sentinel. I thought if I was to fall to-morrow, I could like it were thereabouts.

Alexius. Thy fourth?

Sentinel. I thought when Count Isaac was Emperor, he would be for recasting the army, and I should tell him I was getting old in the service and could like to be one of the Immortals.

Alexius. That I'll be bound for him thou shalt.

Sentinel. How canst thou tell?

Alexius. I know he takes care of those that stick to their old generals and look cold on the new.

Sentinel. How know'st thou that? Thou art of the eastern forces.

Alexius. None knows thy master better.

Enter an Officer.

Officer. My Lord, your brother waits you hard by where the roads meet.

Alexius. I come. Farewell to thee. See thou keep a keen look-out to the north and west; the moon will soon be up, and on the scout side of the field; all thou need'st take heed of comes between thee and the light. Farewell. I'll tell Count Isaac thy deserts.

[*Exeunt* ALEXIUS *and Officer.*

Sentinel. Holy Mother of God! that will be the young Count himself. 'Tis well he takes it no worse; for, to say the truth, I did him but scant justice. What was it I said to him? No doubt but I told him plain out every thought that has come into my head for this year and more.

SCENE III.—*A Churchyard.*—COMNENUS, ALEXIUS, *and* Guide.

Comnenus. This road is but uneven. How is this?

Guide. It is the burial-ground, my Lord; these hills are graves.

Comnenus. Then do we trespass; but the dead ne'er heed us.

Ha! Pray you, trip not up my heels, good friends,
That lie in wait so stilly.

Guide. Hush, my Lord.

Comnenus. I tell thee that they heed us not.

Guide. Our feet
They heed not and they hear not; but some tell
How a light word's recorded till the day
When they shall burst their graves.

Comnenus. And so it is;
Words though from earth with wings they fly away
Yet perish not nor lose themselves in space,
But bend their course towards eternity,
And roost beneath the judgment-seat of God.
What may yon shape be, hewn upon the tomb?

Guide. A cherub 'tis, my Lord.

Comnenus. What, with that damnable visage?

Guide. It is thus, my Lord, they carve them.

Comnenus. 'Tis wondrous hideous. When I die, Alexius,
I'll have an image of another mould

Shall smile a cherub's blessing o'er my dust.
What, ha! again—that rogue,
The bungling sexton, overplied his task
And buried us the epitaph; this stone
Hath but one knob above ground, which obtrudes
"Siste Viator" to who journey darkling.
Well, there's a lesson when the tablet's buried
More than its scroll could read us. Sit we here.
This stone is new: there's but one name inscribed,
And a long blank for chronicling the friends
Whose hour comes after. Why not write their names?
Then were the date but wanting. Look again—
"Here lieth" (say rather "here once lay")
"The body of Peter Andros, a true spouse
"And tender father—may the dust lie light . . ."
Why, look you there! the relict of this Peter
(Whom I once knew) and his all-duteous sons
Drave Peter hitherward ere they bore him here;
And here they stood around the low-laid sire,
Echoing the hollow rattle of the mould
Upon his coffin-lid with hollow groans;
And then they wrote his epitaph,—a true one,
Which yet they lied in writing. Could we call up
The rings of mourners that have girt these mounds
And bid them show their faces, 'twere a sight
That to behold the Devil should jump for joy.
But they have followed.—What may be the name
Of yonder church?

Guide. It bears its founder's name,
St. Nicolaus Pontifex, my Lord.

Comnenus. Ay, is it so? Alexius, this place
I should have known, but that the dusk deceived me.
Once in this ground I saw a friend interred,
And I would fain revisit now the spot.
From hence I know my road. I'll follow you.

[*Exeunt* ALEXIUS *and* Guide.

This is the very earth that covers her,
And, lo! we trample it like common clay!
Chance shall I call it merely—but blind chance,
That at this fateful, questionable hour,
Brings me to blunder thus upon the spot
That I have shunned for years as haunted ground!
Is it not haunted? When I last stood here
Disguised to see a lowly girl laid down
Into her early grave, there was such light
As now half shows it, but a bleaker air,
For it was in December. 'Tis most strange;
I can remember now each circumstance
Which then I scarce was conscious of; like words
That leave upon the still susceptive sense
A message undelivered till the mind
Awakes to apprehensiveness and takes it.
'Twas o'er—the muttered unattended rite,
And the few friends she had beside myself
Had risen and gone; I had not knelt, but stood
With a dull gaze of stupor as the mould

Was shovelled over and the broken sods
Fitted together; whilst some idle boys
Who had assisted at the covering in,
Ran off in sport, and trailed the shovels with them,
Rattling upon the gravel; the sexton then
Flattened the last sods down, and knocked his spade
Against a neighbouring tomb-stone to shake off
The clinging soil,—with a contented mien,
Even as a ditcher who has done his work.
I, at that sound, had started from my trance,
Conscious of its completion, but the keen frost
Had ta'en the power of motion from my limbs.
How I came thence I know not, nor dared ask.
But now I dare recall these things. Oh, Christ!
How that which was the life's life of our being
Can pass away and we recall it thus!
Irene! if there's aught of thee that lives,
Thou hast beholden me a suffering man;
Hast seen the mind—its native strength how racked,
Hast seen the bodily frame how sorely shaken,
And thou wilt judge me, not as they do who live,
But gently as thou didst judge all the world
When it was thy world.——
On many a battle's eve, in many climes,
By the ice-caverned course of black Araxes,
By Ister's stream and Halys and Euphrates,
By Antioch's walls and Palestine's sea-shore,
I have addressed wild prayers unto thy spirit

And with a mind against its natural bent
Tortured to strong devotion, have besought
That thou wouldst meet me then, or that denied,
That I might seek thy world upon the morrow.
And then it would have seemed a thing most sweet,
Though awful, to behold thy bodiless spirit.
But now—and whether from the body's toil
I know not if it be, or fevered blood,
Or wakefulness, or from the mind's worn weakness—
It were a very terror to the flesh
To look on such a phantom :—it is strange
That what we have loved and lost we fear to find
In any shape,—strange that the form so sweet,
So gentle and beloved, I saw laid here,
Now new-arisen would make my blood run cold !
Up, Moon ! for I am fearful of the darkness,
And I have heard a voice that cries aloud—
Home, home, Comnenus !

[*A voice at a distance, calling* COMNENUS.

Where hath he a home ?
His home is with the dead—his home is here—
Father of mercies, take him to his home !

Enter ALEXIUS.

Alexius. Isaac, you stay too long.

Comnenus. Ha ! What ?—too long !

Alexius. What ails you ? are you present to yourself ?
I left you but just now.

Comnenus. True, 'twas just now.

Alexius. And now you look so ghastly! Why is this?

Comnenus. Ay, it was something that I saw just now.

Alexius. You speak without the concert of your mind;
Collect your senses; whence this sudden change?

Comnenus. Be not alarmed; 'twas but some idle thought;
Nought else,—a bodiless creature of the brain;
Think it no more. Alexius, as you said
I am a much changed man, and phantoms come
Before my sight most palpably like truths,
But going thus show clearly what they are.
We should survey yon villa on the left;
Some fifty men might hold it for an hour
And cover our advance till Cos be won.
Come, let us onward. Why, you stand amazed.

Alexius. Go on; I will not quit you.

Comnenus. Time runs out;
'Tis dawn by three o'clock; and ere that hour
Macrinus will be up with half his force
As far as Ithé. I'll send word—but come—
The Moon looms large and shows our footing well.

SCENE IV.—*The Gardens of the Convent of St. Conon.—The* Monk BALBINUS *and an* Acolyte.

Balbinus. The hour is nigh; anon the Count shall come,
And if, as I am bid believe, alone,
He shall return no more. Take thou this scroll;
'Tis for the Captain of the Fort; stand close
Behind yon statue of St. Isidore;
Observe us well, and should I cross myself
Fly with it to the Fort; but should I bend
And clasp my hands, slink through the thicket hence
And meet me at the sacristy. Stop, stay;
Not that way or you meet him. This way; see.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter COMNENUS.

Comnenus. Midnight is past; yon western rim of light
Is sunken and obscured: not gone though yet:
The brow of night is pale—pale, but how lovely!
Quieter far than life, than death less dark;
A voiceless revelation of the things
Which lost their names when Eden was no more.

Balbinus (*behind*). Cherub and Seraph be your blessing here!

Comnenus. But lo! the names are left; oblivion gulfed
The nature, essence, notion—not the name;

So honoured be the all that earth lost not.
I, willing that all words should have their use,
Accepted these for watchwords.—Peace, come forth.

Balbinus. Cherub and Seraph——

Comnenus. Bring thy body forth,
So I may deem that heavenly voice incarnate;
Come, come, thou know'st me.

Enter BALBINUS.

Balbinus. Holy Mary Mother!
My Lord, you're louder than the bell for matins!
You'll rouse the brotherhood.

Comnenus. Which it did never.

Balbinus. To come amongst your enemies alone!
It is mere madness, so I bade him say;
Perilling alike yourself and me that screen you.

Comnenus. Thy counsel whether I should come or not,
Was never asked; I sent to bid thee hither
And finding thee am satisfied. Alone
I have *not* come, save for the last half mile;
Seest thou yon upland; in the dell beyond
A hundred horse are browsing.

Balbinus. Gracious Powers!
You do not purpose an attack?

Comnenus. Not yet;
Unless perchance my person were betrayed.

Balbinus. Surely, my Lord, you question not my faith.

Comnenus. I cannot doubt that it behoves thee keep it.

Balbinus. Pardon me there! though plighted faith still binds,
The rashness of a chief might cast in doubt
Which side is safest.

Comnenus. Not a whit, Sir, no;
By whichsoever is espoused, by that
'Tis safest to abide. Be thou aware
It were a fatal error shouldst thou dream
That thou couldst secretly espouse my cause
And change thy mind at will as things fall out.
Thou stand'st committed to the issue; yea
My good or evil fortunes thou shalt share.

Monk. My Lord, have I desired or more or less?

Comnenus. And if, the while, cross tides shall run me hard,
And then some subtle spirit in thine ear
Whisper "Change sides," with this thou shalt make head
Against that subtle spirit,—thou shalt say,—
"Count Isaac, in his cunning malice, bent
That none be left unscathed if he be smitten,
May have bethought him to leave proof behind
Of all our dealings—proof whereof the tithe
Were all-sufficient in the Patriarch's hands
To doom me to that peace his Church accords
To her false brethren."—In the hour of trial
Thus shalt thou fortify thy better mind.

Monk. My Lord, a cruel stratagem is yours,
If I must needs believe this done, to fix

Your follower's faith; but I am yours till death,
Though sorely wronged.

[*Bending low and clasping his hands.*

Comnenus. Invidious it were
To justify to thee the cutting off
Of that safe second turn which should insure,
Lose they that might, a winning game to thee.
To justify is not my present need;
To have explained suffices.—By the night,
The compline has been done this hour, and now
My cousin might come forth.

Monk. Not here, my Lord;
The trees are ranker to the left, where now
She doubtless waits you: in the cloister near
Your sister will keep watch; on this side I.
The path is at your hand.

SCENE V.—*Another part of the same Garden.*—ANNA COMNENA, *alone.*

Anna. Whate'er the cause I'm glad we meet again;
For our last parting was not to my mind—
A turning off as who should meet by chance
And bid good-morrow—nay, not even that;
He did not say farewell, a word though sad
One would not leave unspoken—still a sweet sound,
Though, it may be, a sound that parts for ever,
The dying cadence of a broken chord.

He did not say farewell, nor did he look it,
Nor kiss it, as he once, though not of late,
Was wont to do. I have outgrown the time
When all was unsuspected, unsuspicious:
And yet I would not be a child again.
How quiet is the night—no breath afloat—
I hear the kine upon the far hill-side
Tear up the long dank grass. And such a morn
Will break the rest of this so peaceful night!
Hark! what is that?

Comnenus (*entering*). Curse on these birchen boughs;
They waked a grey he-owl, who stared amain
To see one here that was not of his order.
Well met, fair cousin! Short our time is here.
Wert thou afraid to come?

Anna. Afraid? oh no;
I nowhere feel so safe as where you are.

Comnenus. Yet few men of a peaceful mind like mine
Have brought such dangers both on friends and foes;
Not wilfully—in no case wilfully;
And now the end is near.

Anna. A happy end,
Oh yes, a happy, blessed end I trust;
And thenceforth and for ever we live in peace.

Comnenus. Under his fig-tree each: so be it! Yet
At this and all times it befits the brave
To look each issue fairly in the face.
The courage of the commonalty sinks

Unless their hearts be sanguine; victory thus
Is in each general's mouth; none cries,
Courage, my friends, for wretched is your plight!
The chances are against us, Death and Defeat!
But by the common cry the common mind
Is buoyed aloft: be it not so with us:
Whatsoe'er possible evils lie before
Let us sincerely own them to ourselves,
With all unstinting, unevasive hearts,
Reposing in the consciousness of strength
Or fervent hope to be endowed with strength
Of all-enduring temper,—daring all truth.

Anna. I am courageous when you bid me be;
But were I left without a friendly voice
To strengthen and exhort me,—left alone
In some disastrous sequel of this strife,
I fear, I fear that I should falter.

Comnenus. Nay,
The fear of fear redoubles fear of fact,
And ofttimes fact is better borne than fear.
The worst assemblage of the worst events
When actual is not so intolerable
As when remote it seems: fancy o'ersteps
The bounds of nature, and miscounts the force
Of cumulative griefs: a first mishap
Has a fair field; the rest are but late comers;
The human mind's capacity of pain
Is no illimitable attribute.

What is it you most dread?

Anna. Oh! when I think
How many a bold adventurer rose in arms
This last indiction, and what fates they met,
They who had won and reigned falling in turn,
And then behold you standing where they stood,
Upon the verge of empire or of——

Comnenus. Death,
Not excæcation, if the thought of that
Calls up these looks of horror. Fear it not.
To no such maimed and ignominious close
Will I degrade my being. Life is now,
I think, with all its evils, eligible;
But one sense less would turn the odds against it.

Anna. But if this dread conjuncture should arrive,
You would not with your own hand cast it off?

Comnenus. Not so, if others can be found: my wish
Has never been unneedfully to arm
My reason or my will against my instincts;
What facile guidance nature gives I take;
In the sharp interchange of blow for blow
Our volatile life transpires at unawares
Without the thought of death, whose sting is thought;
The easiest permeation of mortality
Is this, and this, if need be, shall be mine.

Anna. Whilst I behold you standing by my side
So full of life, my mind will scarce be brought
Fairly to apprehend the fatal change
We speak of.

Comnenus. Death is but a name to you,
Who have but fancied hitherto, not felt
A deprivation. May it so remain!
To me, acquainted with mortality,
A foresight and forefeeling clear and strong
Present the image of the hour to come;
And come when come it may, death comes to me
As a familiar spirit—not desired,
Neither eschewed. Some three good hours ago
I passed a burial-ground, and pondering there
How much by accident it is we live
'Mid all the storms that wreck humanity,
I deemed that there was something yet to do
To clear the coming hours of anxious thoughts;
One possible issue unprovided for.

Anna. I can but look to two events; but two:
Your victory, which quits us of all cares;
Or else your fall; and having proved the worst
There's nothing left to fear; Fear yields to Fate.

Comnenus. Though I should fall, defeat might not ensue;
Alexius might win the crown and wear it.
My thoughts were on that upcast; and therewith
I called to mind how greatness shuffles off
The ties of blood, and oft-divided hearts
Break up the fortunes of a new-made house.

Anna. 'Twill not be so with ours.

Comnenus. That it might not,

Is mainly what has brought me here to-night.
Nought could secure Alexius on his throne
More than Eudocia's counsel; which were lost
Should he receive a stranger's hand in marriage.
I know my sister's heart, and bear in mind
What comes of Aulic councils wherein strives
With an Augusta's will a Cæsarissa's.

Anna. She must be brave who thwarts Eudocia.

Comnenus. Nay;
The empress were high-minded who should not.
Audacious oftener than unenvious
Are women: of them all I know but one
From female jealousies by nature free
In whom Alexius, should he wear the crown,
Would find a fitting consort. You are she.

Anna. I! never; never; oh no, never in me
A consort could he find; me most unfit
For aught but meekly to await the end
And mindful of my kindred with your house
Weep or rejoice as ill or good betides;
In me a consort can he never find.

Comnenus. And wherefore? 'Twas in childhood you last met;
When you survey him with a woman's eyes
You shall confess no woman can resist him.
Oh, childhood's independency of heart
How art thou lost before the loser wotteth!
Why should we doubt the prompt and sure success

Of a good soldier like Alexius?

Anna. I love Alexius as his cousin ought,
But will not wed him: and I say not this,
As many a maiden's protest has been said,
For a defiance; nor does pride prompt me,
Who ne'er was independent of affections,
To say, what said shall bind me evermore,
That come what may, to him imperial honours,
To me distress, bereavement, all that's worst,
I will not wed Alexius.

Comnenus. How is this?
You say you love him as his cousin ought
And then forswear him and renounce his works
With like devotion as he were the Devil.
How know you till you see him grown to man
You may not worship him? Armenian girls
Call him the Mithra of the middle world
That sheds Eoan radiance on the West.

Anna. I meaned not to disparage him; oh no,
He was a gentle boy, of a kind heart
And a quick fancy, and I loved him well.
But do not speak of him as now you did;
That makes me rancorous in my own despite.

Comnenus. I say no more. When time is most to spare
There is a sex in reasoning with whom
I never misemploy it. True it is
That divers motives, many a cogent cause,
Affecting first the empire, next yourself,

And lastly the Comnenian race, demand
Another strain of thought. I press them not.
When these want weight, change may be better hoped
From passion's mutability.

Anna. Oh, God!

The last words these may be we speak together,
And can you thus embitter them, and all
Only because I'm true to my own heart?

Comnenus. Far be reproachful thoughts! my fairest cousin
Shall be as faultless in my sight as fair,
Nor would it derogate from her fair perfection
If she should hold her best affections free
To change as times change; with no wanton lightness,
Nor on vain pretexts, nor from those that *are*
To those that are *not* worthy; but with judgment,
Having regard to who are dead, who live.
This only I would ask, but will not urge.
When the hour comes I spoke of (if it come)
Alexius will better press the pleas
That I shall pass away from. Bear in mind
In after times what I have here let fall:
The seasonable hour will come, though now
My counsel seem unacceptable.

Anna. Alas!

You speak as if you had no hope to live.

Comnenus. My way was through a churchyard, whence, as I said,

My thoughts have brought away a taint of death.
It is my wont upon a battle's eve
To invocate a spirit for my guide
Which till to-night ne'er answered to my call.
What! is the moon so high? 'tis more than time
That I were in my camp. Farewell, my cousin.
Sinless and blameless as thy life hath been
It is not much of ill that can befall thee.
Mine has been less so.

Anna. First and best of friends,
If virtuous, just, and honourable living
And gallant deeds could answer for man's weal,
Yours were not to be feared.

Comnenus. Not much the doubt
Comnenus would stand well with times to come
Were thine the hand to write his threnody.
Yet is he in sad truth a faulty man.
In slavish, tyrannous, and turbulent times
He drew his lot of life, and of the times
Some deep and bloody stains have fallen upon him.
But be it said he had this honesty,
That undesirous of a false renown
He ever wished to pass for what he was:
One that swerved much and oft, but being still
Deliberately bent upon the right,
Had kept it in the main; one that much loved
Whate'er in man is worthy high respect
And did devoutly in his soul aspire

To be it all; yet felt from time to time
The littleness that clings to what is human
And suffered from the shame of having felt it.
But this is posthumous stuff; talk for the tongues
That tell their tales when mine are all told out.
My gentle cousin, hie thee to cover now.
An hour or two and yonder Euxine Sea,
That slowly indues its matutinal grey,
Shall suddenly change colour like a snake,
Enamelled with the glow of other fires
Than those of sunrise. Briefly, fare thee well!
And whatsoe'er be told of me henceforth
A most untruthful annalist were he
Who said I did not love my cousin Anna.

Anna. Go, dearest kinsman: should we meet no more
In many an hour of all my after life
Shall this be treasured inmost in my heart
As kindness for a last memorial left.
Go, and good Angels guard you is my prayer.

Comnenus. Good soldiers, Anna. In the arm of flesh
Are we to trust. The Mother of the Gods,
Prolific Mother, holiest Mother Church
Hath banded Heaven upon the side opposed.
No matter: when such supplicants as thou
Pray for us, other Angels need we none.
Now must my horse know nothing of the reins
Until the warder's challenge sound a halt.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Chamber in the Bucoleon.*—NICEPHORUS, *the* Patriarch, *and the* Abbot of St. Conon's.

Abbot. I cannot but commend your Grace's course;
She is a woman of ungoverned spirit
And were she in her helplessness so urged
Might do some violence to herself, which still
Men's minds, more prone to scandal than to faith,
Would fix upon the Church. Count Lyra's death
Is yet a question and a calumny
Rife in men's mouths, despite the miracle.
Patriarch. It pleaseth God to hasten no man's hour
But straight our Order is impeached, as we
Could make men linger.
Nicephorus. For our present need
Reserve we force until devices fail.
Abbot. All shall be ordered with the strictest heed
To what your Grace directs.
Nicephorus. Yet have regard
To what runs counter, what occasions serve.
In this time's mutability, the pleas

That rule one hour the next may abrogate.
Wherefore, by due observance of the times
Mould thou the means as best to work my end.
A woman and a child are easy dealt with.

Abbot. To work your Grace's will and save the shrine
From the reproach of violence, I will try
All gentle and benign devices first . . .

Nicephorus. And should these fail to draw the culprits forth
Expect my further will. Enough is said.
They wait you in Sophia's.

SCENE II.—*A Suburb.*—ALEXIUS, *his* Lieutenant, *and* Soldiers.

Alexius. Stand fast. The Sunian suburb is on fire.
Send word to Eulas to advance and storm
The Atrian gate; with half his force—no more;
The troops that guard it will but feign to fight;
They're won. With t'other half do thou thyself
Rejoin Count Isaac. There is nought to fear.
The famed Varangian brawlers led the flight,
Their leader leading them. His father, Anx,
Our prisoner, saw it and his bald head blushed.
Begone! Remember—half his force.

Lieutenant. The rest

I carry to Count Isaac.

Alexius. Ay, at once.

Now with our ladders to the walls, my friends.

SCENE III.—*Interior of the Church of St. Sophia.*—Thuriferi *swinging censers on each side of the altar. A number of* Priests *holding tapers and performing from time to time the ritual deosculations of the images. A congregation of old men and women. The* Patriarch *is descending the steps of the altar.*

Patriarch. As many goats as sheep.—No more of this—

Ye do but bring each runaway and skulk

Hither to seek a shelter. Quench those lights.

Enter THEODORA.

Theodora. What doth this people here? What, know they not

The battle rages to the very walls

And none to man them?

An old Man. Princess, we are old.

Theodora. Old! and how is it then ye know no better

Than thus to cupboard up your vapid dregs

Like something precious?

Patriarch. Said I not? Lo, there!
The very women cry out shame. Away!

Enter a Soldier.

Patriarch. Whence comest thou?
Soldier. From Phenar in much haste.
The Emperor is sore beset, and saith
Unless some aid be brought that all is lost.
Patriarch. Who feareth loss that fighteth for the Lord?
Why arms he not the citizens and the slaves?
Soldier. They will not arm; I saw them in the streets;
Prostrate before the images they lay,
Stricken with fear; the ways were filled with monks
Passing in long processions to the shrines.
Patriarch. Oh, God! raise up thy people. Lo! I take
A blessed relic from Sophia's shrine!
This sword contains a scraping of the steel
Of that spear's head which pierced the side of Christ;
What host shall stand against the Lord of Hosts?
Arm ye, my children, arm ye for the fight!
St. Theodore, St. Maurice, and St. George
Shall strike with them that strike with this dread sword.
Cast down your lights; find weapons where ye may—
What host shall stand against this sacred sword?

SCENE IV.—*The City near the Walls.—A* Soldier *keeping ward. To him enter another running.*

1st Soldier. From what side comest thou?

2nd Soldier. From Petræum, covered with laurels. There is nothing in war so glorious as a successful retreat. I have left the dead, but brought off the baggage.

[*Exhibits articles of plunder.*

I'll give thee this ring an' thou'lt show me the nearest way into the sewers.

1st Soldier. Dost take me for a scavenger? Thou art for slinking off.

2nd Soldier. I! perish the thought! 'Tis a point of generalship. Didst never hear of a city being surprised through the sewers. If I were there, I could keep the pass against a thousand.

1st Soldier. Indeed, thou wouldst keep it all to thyself, for the thousands are coming the other way—over the walls. But I'll take thy ring, for methinks I know what way thou camest by it; thou hast been killing and rifling thy wounded comrades; I'll take thy ring, and show thee the way to a safer place than the sewers—there—

[*Turns round suddenly and stabs him.*

Get thee underground and give me up thy ill-gotten gear.

Enter several other Soldiers.

1*st Soldier* (*as he rifles the body*). Good soul! wounded to death, I fear me! The best of friends—a military testament—left me all he had—alas!

3*rd Soldier*. Truly and no little either—ha! Come, let's have fair play,—we will all go shares.

Enter an Officer: *the soldiers quit the dead man and gather round him.*

Officer. How fares it here?

4*th Soldier*. The same as everywhere—ill fare; it fares foully; the sally is beaten back to the walls.

Officer. There was a rumour with us that a miracle had been wrought.

4*th Soldier*. The miracle of making live men dead; I saw no other. But there was the old Patriarch among the foremost soldiers, with a rusty sword that came from Jerusalem.

Officer. What did he with it?

4*th Soldier*. Why, he held it up before the ranks and prayed lustily. The enemy were shy of it till Comnenus rode up and brake it in twain with his lance, and then they all fell on and the sally was driven in.

Officer. They say the Emperor was there himself.

4*th Soldier*. No man in the field fought better. This day has made a soldier of him again.

5*th Soldier*. Here is some one coming this way.

Officer. It is the Emperor and the Eparchs. Jump on to yon wall; you were best not be found doing nothing.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter NICEPHORUS, *followed by* Eparchs *and other* Officers. *Also the* Patriarch.

1st Officer. The sum of all is, he will have no truce.

Nicephorus. Ay, but I'll bring him to another mind:
Return and say a Synod hath been called
Which doth adjudge that by the Nicene canon
The Church affords no sanctuary to those
She theretofore detruded from her pale.
Add that in such sort as he grants conditions
Which may spare innocent blood, so shall I deal
With his heretical kindred. Get thee gone.

[*Exit* First Officer.

The last attack told hardly, my brave friends;
Yet was it fairly faced.

1st Eparch. To speak God's truth,
I think, my Liege, we had better sped at last
Had there been none but soldiers to bring off.

2nd Eparch. When first the monks came out, they gave some spur
To the fight; but after, when our line broke up,
They were a questionable aid: some stood
Like landmarks, others knelt, most ran
With more of haste than speed, and shook to air

The order of retreat.

Nicephorus. The Patriarch's troops
Find little favour with my soldiers.

Patriarch. Yea;
Harlots find favour with thy soldiers; feasts,
Riotous feasts, find favour with thy soldiers;
And therefore favour find they not with God.

Nicephorus. Nay, nay, Lord Patriarch, let's not charge each other
With aught that hath befallen. Both did well.
May we so aid each other to the end.

Re-enter First Officer.

1*st Officer.* May it please your Majesty, upon the road
I learned the Count Comnenus had been lost.
The last who saw him said it was apart
From the main body, with the troop of horse
That drave some friars through the Eastern breach,
And thereabouts they found his shield and spear.

Nicephorus. Then go proclaim thine errand on the walls,
And say, unless an hour shall bring reply
St. Conon's is no sanctuary thenceforth
For any of his kin. Now to the ditch.

[*Exeunt* Officers, Eparchs, etc.

(*As the rest go out, the* Patriarch *detains* NICEPHORUS.)

Patriarch. An evil hour were this, should we invade
The Church's privilege to prop her creed

Or spare her sons.

Nicephorus. Extremity, my Lord,
Will ever force the cures that wound; 'tis vain
To blink them.

Patriarch. Vain, if other there were none.

Nicephorus. See you not every outwork stands exposed?
Nought but an instant truce can save us now,
And he will grant it only to redeem
These women's lives; so they shall to the walls,
And if the Abbot fails to draw them forth
They must be brought by force.

Patriarch. I grant they must;
But was't not said that near the eastern gate
The arms of Count Comnenus had been seen
And that himself was missing?

Nicephorus. So they said.

Patriarch. Then let these arms be found, for they will aid
Our holy end, to spare the sanctuary
From rude irreverent force, too needful else.
This must be looked to.

Nicephorus. Ho! the signal sounds.
Let us not lag behind.

SCENE V.—*The Convent of St. Conon's.*—EUDOCIA *and* ANNA COMNENA.

Anna. Hark! cousin.

Eudocia. I know that sound. It is the Uri's horn.

Anna. And look there: yon is not sunrise?

Eudocia. No, 'tis the Greek fire on the other side of the hill.

Anna. Heaven! is the attack begun, then?

Eudocia. I trust in Heaven it is.

Enter the Abbot of St. Conon's.

Abbot. I come, deputed by the Emperor
Upon a gracious mission. I am to say
He never warred with women and for you,
Whom he holds faultless of this vile revolt,
To see you driven like culprits to this strait
Afflicts him sorely; and with all respect
He proffers an asylum in the palace
Where honourable safeguard and respect
Await you.

Eudocia. Let thy Emperor be told
They wait me from a greater far than he,
Isaac Comnenus, whom may God preserve!

Abbot. I fain would be the bearer, with your leave,
Of a more seemly answer; it is fit
I bid you know you find not safety here;

Mine age, my holy calling, bid me stand
Betwixt you and that precipice's brink
Whither you . . .

Eudocia. Hath your Emperor been pleased
To signify his further will through you?

Abbot. He gave no further message.

Eudocia. Nor do I.

[*Exit* Abbot.

Anna. Why do you speak so fiercely?

Eudocia. 'Tis all one;
The time is passing and the term approaching;
When swords are drawn soft words are out of date.

Anna. Would it were day!

Eudocia. I would it were; this light
Shows the old monks like dead men walking.

Anna. Yes;
None living do I dread as I dread them.

Eudocia. Here comes another. Well, thine errand, monk?

The Monk *enters.*

Monk. St. Conon's name be praised! Count Isaac's ours.

Eudocia. Who sent thee with that tale? It is not true.

Monk. St. Conon's name be praised! Lo! hither come
His shield and spear; it is the Emperor's will

That as a meet oblation they be laid,
With fitting rites, before St. Conon's shrine.

Enter Monks *in procession, bearing the shield and spear, and chanting "Gratias agimus." They lay them on the altar and with the customary genuflexions and thurifications pass off.*

Eudocia. Gallant Comnenus! and is such thy fate!
The boldest heart in Christendom was thine,
And thine, as was thy due, the fastest friends
And faithfullest soldiers. Now doth Ruin reign!
Now be our race extinct, for never more
A name so noble shall adorn its annals.
He said be bold and we should meet again;
And Heaven shall witness that I have been bold;
But never, never as a captive,—no,
Not in captivity shall we e'er meet.
The term of princely durance is but short.

Anna. They cannot slay him—oh no, no, they cannot.
The fiercest soldier would not lift his hand
Against Comnenus.

Eudocia. Tempt not thou thy heart;
Yield not to hopes, but arm thee with despair.
The stake was noble—'twas the eldest crown
In Christendom, and which, if worn by him,
Had grown in splendour through a glorious reign.
The loss is great;—so might have been the meed.

It was a cause worthy my brother's sword.

Anna. Oh! holy Father, say they will not slay him.

Monk. The Emperor is merciful in judgment;
Imprisonment may serve, with loss of eyes.
'Twere safe to blind him.

Eudocia. Blind him! slave of slaves,
Unworthiest to give utterance to his name!
Low in the dust must be Count Isaac's state
When such as thou dare breathe thy blights upon him.

Monk. Lady, 'twere good you were less splenetic;
If you could frame some more becoming speech
And audience of the Emperor were obtained
Or of the Lady Theodora, then . . .

Eudocia. I ask not audience of either—Hark!
'Tis a mere incoherency of mind
That angers me with such as thou—attend—
Thou bring me to the presence of the Count
By any means thou wilt, and I bestow
This diamond thy reward.

Monk. Then with all haste
Set forward to the palace.

Eudocia. Who comes here?

Enter an Officer.

Officer. I bear the Lady Theodora's signet
And have it from her Highness in command
To say her bidding here.

Eudocia. Say on, Sir, speak.

Officer. Her Highness gave command that to no ear
It should be uttered, save to yours.

Eudocia (*to the Monk*). Thou hear'st.

[*Exit* Monk.

Officer. Your pardon, Lady, are there none else near?

Eudocia. What fear'st thou? there is no one—none—
speak out.

Officer. I come from Count Comnenus.

Eudocia. Thou from him!
Thou comest then from his prison. Tell me where,
That I may hasten thither.

Officer. From his prison?
Far be the prison doors that close on him!
His cause is hopeful.

Anna. Hopeful, say you? God
Be merciful and make that tiding true!
His cause is hopeful!

Eudocia. And if it prevail,
The first and only boon I ask of him
Shall be to truss me up these lying monks
And sprinkle yonder altar with the blood
Of one most just and righteous sacrifice.
Where is Count Isaac, Sir?

Officer. He bade me tell
How all things stood: A spy brought word at dawn
That Synods had been holden and some ill
There was devised which had respect to you.

The sallies from the gates to the south and east
Just at that hour grew hotter, but the Count,
Seeing the issue was on that side safe,
Called from the pursuit a few trusted friends
Of whom I rank myself the humblest; these
Of shields and spears divested them and crept
To some suburban hovels; there they drew
Above their armour the monastic garb,
Then sped as flying from the enemy
And through a breach found entrance to the streets.
To waive suspicion then from shrine to shrine,
With crosses and mock-relics held aloft,
Through awe-struck multitudes they took their way
With offerings for each altar. In due time
They will approach St. Conon's—whence the Count
Sware that no power should drive him till his flag
Were flying on Sophia's.

Eudocia. A bold oath that!
Will he cast off disguise and stand on force
So soon as he gains entrance?

Officer. When the horns
Sound from the steep of Ergon, not till then;
But when they capture Ergon, thence the troops
Can aid us in good time.

Anna. Is he far off?
Where didst thou leave him?

Officer. In the Kamian way:
There he was met by rumours that himself

Was captured, and not doubting whence they came
Nor knowing but they might work for ill to you
He bade me cast my weeds and with this sign
(A ring the Princess gave in days of old)
Gain access here.

Enter an Attendant.

Attendant. Your guard is at the gates;
The Father waits your coming.
Eudocia. Let him wait;
Tell him my mind is changed; I will not go.
[*Exit* Attendant.

Enter certain of the Brotherhood of St. Conon's, crying "Kyrie Eleison—an offering for the Shrine." *The* Comnenians *follow, cowled and stoled, with relics and crosses and their offering in a vase. They proceed down the stage and kneel before the curtain of the altar. Enter the* Abbot of St. Conon's.

Abbot. You must attend me to the palace.
Eudocia. How!
Abbot. Ay—instantly. A rescript hath arrived;
You and your younger relative must go.
Eudocia. Invade the right of sanctuary! what words
Are these to hear from Churchmen!
Abbot. It is vain.
A Synod hath been holden and decrees

Your heresy has forfeited the right.

Eudocia. What if we dare dissent from such decree!

Abbot. The secular arm is ready to compel
Instant obedience. Soldiers wait without.
'Tis true the Church hath alway reverenced
The rights of sanctuary when such protect
Offenders against human laws alone;
But when Almighty Heaven hath suffered wrong
The Church were but a patron of the sin
Should she protect the sinners. Ho! the guard!

[*Here one of the* Comnenians, *having advanced gradually to the front, steps between the* Abbot *and* EUDOCIA.

Comnenian. Brother, of this the doctrine thou deliverest
I cannot tell thee less than that 'tis false.
It is a lying doctrine, brother—yea,
A doctrine which the Devil hath inspired
Into thy Synod and which God abhors.

Abbot. And what art thou that thou shouldst interpose?
Am I not highest of mine order here?

Comnenian. I tell thee that thy words are not of God;
Nor shall the touch of secular force pollute
This holiest, as the best inhabited,
Of all God's dwelling-places here on earth.

Abbot. Thou contumacious monk! what right is thine

To say to me this shall be or shall not?
Ho! the Imperial Guard! thou shalt see proof
How what I do in this is countenanced.
Dost see this writing? Seest the purple ink?
A warrant in the Emperor's very hand
Gives order for proceedings to this length.

Comnenian. A stronger warrant in Count Isaac's hand
Arrests them.

[*Throws off his disguise and draws his sword. The rest do the like.*

Abbot. Guards! Ho! Treason! Treason! Help!
[*Exit.*

Comnenus. Defend the doors. My bravest of the brave,
Well met in any hour! and gentle Anna,
A fitter time for greetings shall be ours.
Form into line.

[*The* Comnenians *form a line on each side, leaving a passage between them down to the altar.*

My sister, not a man
You see before you but in this day's fight
Did champion's service. At the altar's foot,
Anna and you shall take your station; pass,
And as you pass extend a hand to each
Of these your soldiers, which, as he receives,
He in his martial heart will pledge his faith,
Long as it beats with life to fight your battles.

Eudocia. My gallant friends, may fairer hands than this
Be your reward when this day's work is wrought.

[COMNENUS *leads* EUDOCIA *and* ANNA *between the lines down to the altar. The clash of arms is heard without, and the Varangian trumpets.* COMNENUS *draws aside the curtains of the altar.*

Comnenus. My sister, sit you here. Ha! what be these?
Behold a miracle, my spear and shield!
Now by the God of battles this is strange
Nor less auspicious. To the charge they go.

Guards at the doors. We cannot keep the gates; they're not of strength.

Comnenus. Back each man to his station. Keep them not.

[Varangians *defile through the gates. Horns are heard in the distance.*

Captain of the Varangians. Behold the impious heretic himself!
Yield, or be hewn in pieces, thou and thine.

Comnenus. If thou wilt do that office on but one
Of them thou seest, I pledge my royal word,
When I hang up thy rebel-kind to-morrow,
To grant remission of thy forfeit head.
Enough of talking. Hark! Comnenians, hark!
List ye the horns from Ergon. Now, fall on.

Down to the dust, idolaters.

[*As the fight proceeds a cry of* "Comnenus" *is heard, and* ALEXIUS *enters at the opposite gates with his soldiers. The* Varangians *are driven out.*

Alexius. Well fought, my friends! the last of this day's fight.
Behold our flag is flying on Sophia's
And ye may sheathe your swords; the day is ours.

[*The Comnenians shout:* "Isaac Comnenus! may he rule us long! Long may the brave Comnenus wear the crown!"

[*The common soldiers are heard crying confusedly:* "Proclaim him Emperor. Go, bring the crown. Where are the purple buskins? Long may he live! Long live Count Isaac!"

Alexius. And where *is* Count Isaac?

Several soldiers. Where is Comnenus?

A soldier. When I saw him last
He passed beside yon image of the Saint.

Another. St. Conon's,—ay, and struck it as in sport
And split the marble with his glove of mail.

Alexius. Gone doubtless to the front. Eudocia! Ah!
A happy meeting this! a joy of joys
To meet my sister, after all these years,
In Victory's hour, with Fortune at her feet.

Eudocia. Alexius, God grant you rich reward

Of rare desert. A younger face is here,
Which you can brighten with a livelier grace.
Alexius. My gentle cousin, be this homage yours
From all the Eastern Empire. Friends, repair
To the imperial palace; as you go
Proclaim Count Isaac Emperor through the streets.
Sound the Comnenian march. Now, all set forth.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*An apartment in the Prisons.*

Nicephorus (*alone*). Morn, let me meet thee face to face once more;
Thou look'st upon me with an unmoved front,
The pale cold aspect of a wearied friend.
Well, well; my race was run; 'tis but in age
That Fortune plays me false; 'tis but in age
When all that I can lose she doth but snatch
Out of the hand of Death. 'Twas in my youth,
When she was kind, her constancy bore price;
For then there was a life to make or mar.
There's many an infant Hercules is dwarfed
By lacking a first meal, and me she fed
From a full breast and held me by the hand
Till I could run alone. She quits me now,
But not till time is that I quit the world.
Kings ought not to be old. The strength of thrones
Is youth. The infirmities of age in Kings
Cripple the body politic: first fails
Life's vigour at the heart; a numbness next
Seizes the weak extremities of empire;

Then some old sore breaks out, and all at once
The nice adjustments of the strong-knit frame
Are rent like rotted ligaments asunder.
There's some one comes; — but here's such scanty light——
Who stands within the Emperor's prison doors?
Comnenus (*who has entered*). Isaac Comnenus.
Nicephorus. Thou art welcome, Count;
More welcome to my prison than my palace.
Comnenus. I know it. Never was I welcome there.
Had I been less obnoxious in thy sight
I had not sought thy fall. Nor seek I now
Thy further fall than what defence demands.
I would give room for thy fast shortening days
To gather in the aftermath of life
And garner for a better world what here
May yet be reaped.
Nicephorus. My life! What life is that?
A mangled life that crawls along the base
Of the huge precipice o'er which it fell;
A life that were it whole were little worth
At threescore years and twelve, and being pierced
With many a mortal wound, may count its price
As less than little. Yet I take thy gift.
Comnenus. Gladly I find there's aught I have to give
Worth thine acceptance. One condition yet
Demands fulfilment that the crown be safe;
For to that end provision must be made

That derogates in some sort from my grant.

Nicephorus. Thou aim'st then at my liberty. So be it.
The loss of liberty! What loss is that?
Who hath it? Not the rich man. Not the poor.
The rich of what he owns is owned the slave;
The poor a bondsman to necessities,
Selling himself in parcels. And a prison!
To that old age arrives by Nature's doom,
Barring the wrongs of fortune; an old man
More meekly may endure it.

Comnenus. Somewhat else
Remains for stipulation. While thou hold'st
Thy station in men's minds as being still
One of an order capable of empire,
Thy friends will breed expectancy of change.

Nicephorus. "Friends" was thy word? in truth an empty fear!
My friends! In thousands yesterday at dawn
Like leaves in summer did they hang on me;
But ere night fell, as with a winter's blight,
They were abroad upon the several winds.
Now, by God's name, it grieves me to the heart
They were not sepultured in yonder trench.

Comnenus. Be it thy friends are friends of him who reigns,
Thy malcontents will soon be such to us,
And every disaffection that may grow
Take the good name of loyalty to thee.

Nicephorus. What surety wouldst thou have?

Comnenus. Assume the tonsure.
The service of the Church, whilst it forbids
The thoughts men might attach to thee of empire,
Becomes thy latter days.

Nicephorus. Ay doth it, Count?
Hast thou forgotten, in thy feast of power,
The tenor of the life thou'dst have me close
In mockery of myself? The tonsure, Count!
Dim though they be, these latter hours of life,
I quickly call to mind the glorious dawn
When first amidst Mount Rhodope's defiles
A Thracian soldier I took spear in hand;
And though that spear be splintered and that hand
Be nerveless now, I yet have that within
That stoops not to conditions such as thine.
A prisoner thou may'st make me,—not a puppet.

Comnenus. I meaned no contumely. A fitter time——

Nicephorus. No more—I see thee not again—henceforth
All that the Emperor of his gaoler seeks
Is that his latter hours be undisturbed.

Comnenus. Farewell: but should thy meditations bring
Another mood of mind, spare not to speak it.
Thy summons on the instant brings me back.

[*Exit.*

Nicephorus. My life hath been such life as Kings must bear

Who would be more than pageants: it has been
A life of anxious, strenuous thought, and deeds
That sprang from such: yea and all men must say,
Howe'er I governed, it was I that governed:
No minister has played the monarch here.
I have swayed nations—less by kingly power
Than by a power within me which had swayed
The minds around me had I *not* been King.
My single destiny is all that now
Remains for me to govern; nor shall I
Be found unequal to this final charge.
How many times in youth a violent death
Seemed imminent, yet brought me no alarm
And now the loss of so much less of life,
And that less portion of less rateable worth,
Would surely not seem fearful, but that age
Counts with its ills tenacity of life,
The old inveterate habit of existence.

Enter THEODORA.

My daughter, com'st thou to console thy sire?
Thy filial duty hath not been o'erpaid,
But such a time as this were ill employed
In aught but kindly speech.

Theodora. Father, I come
In this most bitter hour to aid your counsels.
I have not used (and therefore has our love

Held heretofore a not unbroken course)
All words of tender import which are rife
In women's mouths; and if I had such now
What could they profit you?

Nicephorus. What hast thou better?

Theodora. Daggers.

Nicephorus. Hush! hush! that is no woman's word.

Theodora. Yea, 'tis a woman's word and woman's weapon.

But there are hands to hold them more than mine,
Though there be none more steady. Time runs out.
The menials of the palace as I came
Were busied with the pageant of to-morrow.
Grant that a woman's doom had laid in the dust
The head which they would crown.

Nicephorus. Why were it done,
Deem'st thou the difference of a single head
Shall quell a reigning faction? Had the blow
Been struck while yet the victory was in doubt
Their leader lost had been the loss of all;
But now 'twere a miracle if they kept not
What he hath won.

Theodora. Father, your years benumb you.
Wherefore is this? the Patriarch wears a coil
Of twenty winters more, yet his blood's hot;
And I, a woman, do not yet despond.

Nicephorus. The Patriarch's fury blinds thee to his dotage.

I tell thee there's no hope. As easily
Recall the colour to a corpse's cheek
As give them heart again.

Theodora. You will not hear;
The cohort which deserted yesternight,
Though paid their hire, were coldly entertained;
Wherewith but ill-content, this day they've sworn
To rise in arms upon the Patriarch's call.
All now is loose, the townsmen and the troops;
None careful but the conquered. One blow struck
Confounds them in their mirth.

Nicephorus. This old man's dream
Which he hath told thee doth portend nought else
But that a night of blood will interlope
Ere the Comnenian dynasty begin.

Theodora. My father, hear.

Nicephorus. Nay, nay; I know too well
That sleepless Chief whose eye is over all,
Be feasting they that will.

Theodora. Then at your choice
Cleave still to your despair. I go,—and soon
Here in your cell or on your throne resumed
A tale will reach you of as bold a deed
As e'er was done by our most martial sires
Upon the Thracian hills. Till then, farewell!
Father—your blessing.

Nicephorus. Oh! my child, much grief,
Sore trouble hast thou brought me in my time;

But I forgive thee now, nor may I blame
This enterprise, all hopeless though it be.
Take thou thy father's blessing and depart.
I in the inner chamber will go seek
That rest the time invites me to. Farewell.

SCENE II.—*A Street near the Palace of the Cæsars.*—ISAAC COMNENUS *and* MACRINUS *meeting.*

Macrinus. Count Isaac, by my life! Well met, my Lord—
Nay, your Imperial Highness—pardon me
If my first meeting with my sovereign Lord
Be something overjoyful.
Comnenus. Good Macrinus,
There's none entitled to a larger share
Of whatsoe'er of joy this hour affords.
Where is my brother?
Macrinus. In the palace, Sire,
And with the rest awaiting you.
Comnenus. And where
Have you disposed the soldiery?
Macrinus. They crowd,
And with them half the city, to the square
Before the palace; all expectant wait
To hail you Monarch ere they doff their mail
And with rejoicings close the glorious day.

Comnenus. Something too soon, Macrinus. And my guard?

Macrinus. They are within, my Lord.

Comnenus. So far is well.
Are those deserters looked to?

Macrinus. Which, my Lord?
I knew not that a single friend proved false.

Comnenus. Ay, but the false proved friends. Observe them well.
I mean that Mæsian cohort—they that oped
The Atrian gate to Eulas.

Macrinus. By my faith
They were but now before the palace; yes;
A Lombard shirt of mail they wear, and sword
Much like a Frank's—I marked them there but now.

Comnenus. March out my guard, and let them be disarmed.

Macrinus. 'Twill cause much discontent, my Lord.

Comnenus. Why so?
They'll share the donative; so say, Macrinus.
I will reward them, but I will not trust them.

Macrinus. It shall be done, my Lord. And will you then
Indulge the impatient multitude that longs
To shout their gratulations?

Comnenus. Noise and pomp
Is what they long for. They will have it soon.
To-morrow comes the coronation; then

They'll have it to their hearts' content; to-day
There's something I would say to them . . . no matter.
The Count Alexius, said you, was within?
Macrinus. He is, my Lord.
Comnenus. A noble youth is he.
Macrinus. Indeed he is.
Comnenus. And a good soldier too.
Macrinus. There's not a man on either side his peer.
He has a martial heart.
Comnenus. And therewithal
The rapid eye, ubiquity of presence,
And quickness and collectedness of thought
Which give a natural command in war.
Macrinus. He has, my Lord.
Comnenus. For he was from a boy
By care taught conduct. No state-weakling he,
Born in the purple and so bred a fool.
He is, though young, well practised in affairs.
Macrinus. Surely, my Lord.
Comnenus. In him there is besides
The strong vivacity of youth and health,
With something of a gallantry of spirit
That wins upon the multitude.
Macrinus. Most true.
The troops he has commanded love him well.
Comnenus. A word with thee, Macrinus—— Hark! the throng
Are bellowing my name.

Macrinus. My Lord, they wait
To take you home in triumph. They're nigh mad.
There never was a people so o'erjoyed,
Nor ever yet a city that so rang
With acclamations; not a troop files by
With the Comnenian standard, but the shout
"Long live the Emperor Isaac" peals on high
As from a thousand voices in one breath.
Long may he live and reign!

Comnenus. My friend, my friend,
There's more mortality about this frame
Than known to those who tell its term of years.
The worm within may make the building weak
Ere Time has leant his weight upon the walls.
Well; let us to the palace. I had meant——
But it is needless. From the terrace walk
Above the palace gates I'll speak some words
To thee, to Count Alexius, and the people.
So let us to the palace. But disarm
The Mæsian cohort first, forget not that.

Macrinus. I'll lose no time, my Lord. Hark! there, again!

SCENE III.—*A suburb.*—THEODORA *and an* Officer *of the Mæsian Cohort.*

Theodora. Who wrote it, knowest thou,—this quavering scrawl?

Officer. It is the Patriarch's, Lady.
Theodora. It is like.
Old age hath stricken him. I cannot read it.
Officer. Princess, if I may be so bold to guess,
His Holiness would see you.
Theodora. Wherefore so?
Officer. I know not; he is muttering evermore,
But none can tell his drift. He lies at length
Upon a pallet in St. Cyril's cell.
Theodora. This day hath overwrought his aged frame.
I will attend him. Keep thy men together,
And send me word of whatsoe'er befalls.

SCENE IV.—*A Chamber in the Palace.*—EUDOCIA *standing at a casement.* ANNA *sitting near.*

Eudocia. Look, cousin, look! for a more princely pomp
Ne'er blessed a maiden's sight.
Anna. I'm sick of shows.
What do you see?
Eudocia. The troops, a host in arms,
Fill up the palace square, and them beyond
As far as eye can reach, the multitude
Throng through the ways. Hail to that silken flag,
The proud Comnenian banner! Long may it float
Triumphantly above yon palace gate!

Anna. Your heart is in the pageant; you were wont
To taunt your sex that they were all for shows.
Eudocia. My heart! ay, every pulse of it that beats!
And call you this a show? I tell you, girl,
That were these squares and palaces black dust,
These ways more desert than the Palmyrene,
And were all silent save the mouse-bat's wing,
So that our banner waved above the waste
My triumph would be full.
Anna. Well; be it so;
I meant not to reprove your triumph.
Eudocia. Ah!
I see him,—there he comes, and close beside
The princely boy Alexius. Heard you that?
A shout as of an empire drunk with joy!
Again and louder! Hear you?
Anna. Now they're still.
How suddenly it ceased!
Eudocia. He speaks to them.
I saw him wave his hand.
Anna. Would we could hear!
Eudocia. I heard him once address some mutinous troops:
'Twas with a grace so winning yet so bold
That their ferocious clamour died away
And when he ceased they cried, "Long live the Count!"
Anna. See, from their hands he takes the diadem.
What means he now?

Eudocia. Look! look! Alexius stoops,
And on his head he puts the Crown.
Anna. And hark!
They shout again, and can you not discern
"Long live Alexius!" is the burthen now?
Eudocia. He has transferred the empire! as I live
Discrowned his proper head!
(*A pause.*)
It is not well.
My life long have I looked to see him crowned,
And much I strove and struggled to that end,
And thousands toiled with no less zeal, from whom
Was much less owing, and have they no claim
Who ventured—much or little—all they had,
Or might have or might hope to have, for him—
Have they no rights?
Anna. But should Alexius reign
He will be good and generous to them all.
Eudocia. Alexius! who's to govern in his nonage?
Anna. They ope the gates; the multitude throng in;
Some one approaches.
Eudocia. Isaac, by his step.
I'll tell him all I think.
Anna. Oh no, not now;
Give him a welcome now.

Enter COMNENUS.

My friend, my cousin,
A thousand welcomes leaping to my lips

Would fain be uttered if they could.

Comnenus. Enough;
More than an empire is the worth of one.
You stay too long; the tables are all spread.

Eudocia. Where is your diadem?

Comnenus. 'Tis given away.
No more about it—there's a feast below.

Eudocia. It is not well to balk your triumphs thus,
And cheat the friends who aided you to rise.
All was endured for you—ay, in the hope
That this which has come would come—that this hour
Of full regality would crown the ascent,
The perils of the upward path were braved.

Comnenus. Eudocia, be content; I could not reign.

Eudocia. Not reign! Who says not you were born to reign?

Comnenus. I am not of that mind; of what hath been,
I can say boldly I was born to that;
More can I not,—unless it be worth while
To predicate that I was born to die.
Engraft, my sister, on a greener stock
Your love and pride, and they shall flourish long:
There wants not divination of decay
In that from which your earlier hopes drew life.
Alexius is docile; him your care
Shall train to empire, him your counsel teach,
As counsel is there none by which in straits
I half so much have profited. Now first

I need it not; for henceforth there is none
Can be of counsel with me. I transfer
That with the crown, a not unequal gift
Nor ill assorting with imperial power.

Eudocia. I know you not; so all unroyal now
That rose to royalty so gloriously—
Now when all men are gazing at your height
As at a ruling planetary power.

Comnenus. I never, even when a boy, desired
To be star-gazed of men. You could not think it.
What I desired has been this day fulfilled;
The living of my race are safe and free;
The dead are not dishonoured: some firm friends
And many loose adherents will be paid,
Some less, some more, the wages of their work.
This was desired; this was or will be done;
And being done, I know not that I owe
To dead or living of mankind aught more.

Eudocia. And how wilt thou dispose thy future life
To profit more thyself?

Comnenus. Of that hereafter.
Alexius must feast his Lords below,
And you assist him. I must give meanwhile
Some needful orders and survey the posts
Or e'er the night waste further. Fare you well.

Eudocia. My noble brother, must you go? Farewell.
I said not aught ungentle? if I did,
You know that I have loved you from your birth.

Comnenus. Not an ungentle word—not one—not one.
I'll seek your chamber ere we sleep and court
Some further conference.

Eudocia. I know not why,
But I am loth to see you leave us. Well:
Till midnight I shall scarce expect you back;
But do not fail me then.

Comnenus. About that hour.

[*Exit.*

Eudocia. Oh! I forgot—but he is gone.

Anna. What is it?

Eudocia. I wished to tell him he should take his guard;
The city is disorderly—no matter;
We'll send Macrinus.—Are you ready?—Come.

SCENE V.—*A Cell in the ruins of a Convent.—The* Patriarch *lying on a pallet.*

Enter THEODORA.

Theodora. All goes as we would have it, holy father;
The Mæsian men stand firm and nought transpires.

Patriarch. Who is it—Ha? Who's there?

Theodora. Most reverend Lord,
Arouse you and look up. Our purpose thrives.

Patriarch. I say again who is it? Speak, who is it?

Theodora. The Princess Theodora.

Patriarch. Theodora!

What, hast thou stricken him? reach me thy palm.
Lo! there's no blood—all over ashy white.
The Princess Theodora—why then speak—
Say—hast thou dealt the blow?

Theodora. Father, not yet;
The hour has not yet come.

Patriarch. Not yet, not yet?
That ever was the cry—when I said, "Strike,"
Some coward came between and said, "Not yet."

Theodora. Compose thy mind; the season is at hand,
And duly as the day and night go round
The work shall be fulfilled; for deeper vows
Than ever pilgrim pledged his soul withal
Devote me to this deed.—He hears me not.

Patriarch. Bring holy water that my hands be cleansed.
The Father of the Church this day hath slain
Seven men in battle—be his sins absolved.

Theodora. Christ! that his senses should forsake him now,
At once, and in this need! Arouse thy mind;
Father, Comnenus reigns; this very hour
He will be crowned; bethink thee of the hour.

Patriarch. Think'st thou I hear thee not—beshrew thy shouting—
I bade thee smite him and thou brought'st me back

A pair of lily palms and saidst, "Not yet."
But hark! his soul is cared for: 'twas my charge
And I have tended it: die when he may
There is a weight on that—help! I am slain—
What traitor drave that spear?—Soft, let me lie.

Theodora. Great God! is this his death-stroke?

Patriarch. Let me lie—
Let me lie down.

Theodora. What hinders you, my Lord;
Pray you lie down. His back's as stark as steel.
He is convulsed.—Help, friends, help! help, without!

Enter a Mæsian Officer.

Officer. I greet your Highness with but evil news—

Theodora. Peace with thy news—seest not the Patriarch ta'en
With the death-struggle? help to lay him down.
Soft! he's more placid now. Go, call the priests.
[*Exit the* Officer.
Lo! his eyes open wide:—how now?

Patriarch. Methought
That there was some one dying in this house.
Who may it be?

Theodora. Nay, turn thy thoughts elsewhere;
Call on Lord Jesus and His holy mother;
Think thou wert ever steadfast in the faith

And may'st have hope of grace. Here come the priests.
Ill may I do their office.

Enter Priests.

1st Priest. Much I fear
The life hath left him. Open thou his vest.
The pulse is gone—gone utterly—alas!
The soul's departed.

Theodora. 'Twas an awful strife.
Take forth the body.

2nd Priest. Lo, beneath his vest
Here is a wound still bloody, and received
Doubtless in this day's fight.

1st Priest. And here are scars
Of wounds received long since. Men wont to say
He was not in his youth the sinless saint
We knew him, but a man of lawless life
And militant in other wars than ours.
Some blood was spilt in stifling of that tale,
And like enough he spared the surgeon's aid
Rather than show these scars. So—bear him out.

[*Exeunt* Priests *with the body.*

Theodora. This is a fearful hour. A terrible end
Was that old man's, and if all tales be true
Many a dark deed his soul is charged with. Ay,
A fearful hour to usher in an act
That may lie heavy on the soul hereafter.

Re-enter the Officer.

Thou didst not speak thine errand. Speak it now;
Now I can hear thee.

Officer. By the Count's command
The Mæsians have been suddenly disarmed.

Theodora. Disarmed! and they resisted not?

Officer. Their Chief
Had been entrapped before, and when assured
That all should have an equal share of spoil
They gave their arms.

Theodora. My father's word fulfilled!

Officer. A few were headstrong, and amongst them I,
In cover of a tumult that ensued,
Took sword in hand and brake away to you.

Theodora. Enough, Sir; I discharge you from all dues
Of future service.

Officer. I shall ever hold
My service at your Highness's command.

Theodora. I thank you; for I did not look to find
In such extremity a heart so true.
My last memorial for service done
Is this. Accept it from a fallen friend.

[*Giving a ring.*

Now, Sir, farewell; our common cause expires;
What may remain is Theodora's; she
Will execute henceforth her own behests.

[*Exit the* Mæsian Officer.

Enter a Messenger.

Messenger. Alas! your Highness, there is grievous news;
My Lord, your royal father——
Theodora. What of him?
Messenger. By his own hand hath died.
Theodora. My father dead?
Messenger. The warder found him almost cold and stiff;
He had been dead an hour.
Theodora. No marvel this.
To him the bitterness of death was past;
He has done well and wisely; in the world
He had no more to do; there yet remains
A task of mine unfinished. Now, to work.

SCENE VI.—*A large Hall leading to the Banqueting Chamber in the Palace, from which guests are passing out at intervals. In front is the* Steward *of the Household, with* Musicians *and other* Attendants.

Steward. The healths come faster now. Aye, aye, they're breaking up and not a second too soon. Hark! that is our young Emperor's health they're drinking, and his is the last. Now, my masters of sing-song, give him your good e'en.

Music.

Thou that many a night hast found
Soldier's bed on guarded ground,
There to sleep and thence to leap
Lightly at the trumpet's sound,
Softer bed be thine to-night;
Other summons than to fight
Wake thee with the morning light;
Rise to-morrow and be crowned.

[*Whilst this is sung,* THEODORA *has entered, as a suitor, in a mourning dress with her face veiled.*

Steward. Stand all aside, the guests are coming out.
What wait'st thou for? Make way there! Ho! make way.

Theodora. I wait for Count Comnenus.

Steward. He's not here.

Theodora. He's coming here?

Steward. I cannot tell. Stand close.
Count Cataculo coming out—make room—
That brave commander—noble Cataculo.

Theodora. Is he *not* coming here?

Steward. I cannot tell;
He ne'er was well affected to a feast,
And speaks irreverently—friends, stand back—
Of wine that's older than himself—room ho!—
The only sin that I can charge him with,
God save his soul in heaven!

Theodora. Amen, amen.

Steward. Paleologus coming out—St. George!

That bark's deep laden; Scian wine's aboard;
Yon was a heavy lurch.

Paleologus. Good friends, good night.
Your servant. Let me hold you by the arm;
For, pardon me, you seem to walk but so-so;
Nay, never mind, I'll steady you; I'm sound;
No milksop neither; but I hold it good
That alway one keep sound to help the rest.
So,—steadily—on this side of that lady—
This side the lady in the grave-clothes—Ha!
This side the apparition—cleared, by Jove!
And so a fair good-night to ghosts in black.

[*Going, returns.*

And tell Count Isaac, I forgive Count Isaac
For being thrifty of his bounteous presence;
For I've a guess, a shrewd one, mark you me,
A shrewd conjecture of the why and wherefore,—
And to be wise and say no more about it,
I think it may be he's too drunk to come.

[*Exit.*

Theodora. Hark you; the matter that I bring the Count
Concerns his life.

Steward. How mean'st thou?

Theodora. Yea, it doth.
The scurvy citizens are not content,
And ever and anon some knave cries out
His house is plundered and Count Isaac's men

Have stolen his supper and debauched his wife.
Then lays the rogue his hand upon his hilt
And turns the matter in his beggarly mind,
Feeling dissatisfied: so walks he forth,
And no one's eye is on him.

Steward. In good truth,
Thou hast described a dangerous man; i' faith,
They're very dangerous, your hungry men;
They have no charity for us that eat;
I ever said, put hungry men in prison,
Else you shall surely have them discontent.

Theodora. Yet for the time, seeing there's no offence,
They go at large unheeded.

Steward. No offence?
What call you then the lack of charity?
The lack of Christian charity? What, none?
By my salvation, 'tis a foul offence,
An infamous transgression, which begets
Much peril to us powers that be.

Theodora. I say
There is a danger nearer to the Count
Than any you surmise: where is he?

Steward. Well,
He will be here anon and thou shalt see him.
Away. The guests are rising all. Away.

SCENE VII.—*The Banqueting Chamber.*

Enter ISAAC COMNENUS *and* MACRINUS, *with an* Attendant.

Comnenus. The guests have all departed?

Attendant. All, my Lord.

Comnenus. Here, take my sword. Bring me a cup of wine.

[*Exit* Attendant.

And he is dead?

Macrinus. He bled to death, my Lord.
A barber there had left the instrument
Wherewith he did this violence to himself.

Comnenus. Farewell, Nicephorus the first and last!
Soldier of fortune, bold and free in Thrace,
Poor abject Emperor in Byzantium!
He's better dead, so let us hope, by much.
Thou wouldst not think it, friend, but it is true,
Had I been of this war the wilful cause,
I could have killed myself for conquering
As soon as he for suffering defeat.
Though it be not a soldier's word to say,
The sight of all this blood has sickened me.

Macrinus. No blood has needlessly been shed by us.

Comnenus. By us, I trust, no drop. But think, Macrinus,
When civil war's afoot, whate'er the cause,

And whosoe'er the leaders, in the fray
How many a beast breaks loose and roams abroad
In shelter of an honourable name.
Go, good Macrinus, give my orders forth
That whosoe'er unsheathes his sword to-night
But at the word of his commander, dies;
And in the public view of all who pass
Plant in each quarter where the throng is thick
A headsman and his block. Look it be done.
If chopping off of heads can stop the course
Of these disorders, I will have them stopped.

Macrinus. I will about it straight.

Comnenus. Good night, Macrinus.

[*Exit* MACRINUS.

(*After a pause*). So here am I, to say my work is done.
Thus churchyard visions mock us as we merit,
When man, for lack of manliness, is made
A lazaret for the mind's maladies.

[*Walks to a casement.*

How changed those skies from what they were at eve!
They change as do the destinies of men,
And give no warning,—or at best a brief one.
Black, save a seam, a trench, a gaping chasm
Of ghastly moonshine betwixt cloud and cloud!
And therewithin a pale and shivering star,
Like hope in far futurity, a gleam
Of half-extinguished light still struggles on.—
I feel that chill and heaviness of cheer

Which follows oft a chase that's hotly won ;
For then the hazards and vicissitudes,
The pride of conflict, spur of opposition,
The quickening sense of danger, and the need
And exercise of wit, are all effete ;
And the reward of all (which seen remote
Shone like a Caucasean peak at dawn)
Meets with a cold reality the touch
And bares the blank and nothingness of life.—
Were I a man to take delight in crowns,
And purple boots, and sending forth of bulls,
And dealing out of dignities,—to wit,
Calling this man Sebastos and that Cæsar,
Bidding one worthy follower wear red hose,
Another hope the like advancement soon
And wear them mottled in the mean time—yea,
Could I rejoice in royal sports like these,
I should exult in this day's victory
And not feel all this barrenness within.
I will go hence to-morrow.

Re-enter Attendant *with wine.*

Comnenus (*drinks*). Ho ! the Gods !
That re-creates the spirit. Marvellous !
How this amalgam of a body and soul
Can grain by grain so interpenetrate
That washing of a ventricle with drink
Shall strengthen and uplift the low-laid mind.

Oh, then what potent menstruum is that
Which shall dissolve the so compacted compound
And segregate the subtler element
To live apart when all the other dies.

Enter ALEXIUS.

God save your Highness! Well, how speed you now?
To her Imperial cousin what saith Anna?

Alexius. When first I spoke she said at once 'twas vain;
But when I urged your sanction to my suit,
She faltered and grew pale, then turned away,
Nor honoured me with one look more.

Comnenus. So fixed!
Then shall she have her way and follow me;
And though a wanderer on the earth am I,
I will requite her constancy with care
And in that care may chance to find at times
A resting-place myself.

Alexius. God grant it you!

Comnenus. He will, He will. Some minutes ere you came
A kind of vision had enwrapped itself
Around me like a winding-sheet. I saw
I know not what phantasmas, and was moved
To moralize the matter of that change
Which theologians call—how aptly, say—
The quitting of a tenement, or else

The casting off old clothes—the . . . Oh, the gods!
The figures are as multitudinous
And ugly as their archetype.
Alexius. To me
These seem as apt as any.
Comnenus. Even so.—
The Prophet of the Zend expounded thus
The secret of original sin: he said
When Light, the Power of Good, created man,
Him Evil followed darkly as his shadow.
And this is fair philosophy, whereby
We typify what is not understood,
And say a thing is thus, and thus, and thus,
Just as another thing is thus and thus,
Though how or wherefore either thing came thus
We nothing know. Enough. One week from this
Will find me a day's journey on the road
To the Illyrian frontier. Who is here?
Eudocia and Anna. Take apart
Our sister sage, thy Councillor of State,
And leave to me my Anna. I would hold
Some present conference with my gentle friend.

Enter EUDOCIA *and* ANNA COMNENA. ALEXIUS, *advancing to meet them, leads* EUDOCIA *to the farther part of the stage, where he remains with her.*

What ails thee, Anna? Why this changing cheek?

What rainbow is reflected in those eyes?
What dream hath moulded that pathetic mouth?
Thy lip hath pouted at an Emperor's suit,
And pouts it now repentant?

Anna. Oh no, no!
Though I were truly what I ought to be,
A lifelong and perpetual penitent,
Yet never could my soul repent of that.

Comnenus. Then are we two at odds with empire both;
And being therein of one mind and heart
What should gainsay us that from this time forth
Our hearts and lives be one? Thou know'st not, Anna,
How wide the vacancy, how deep the void,
That opens here, which empires could not fill,
Nor worlds—nay, weep not——

Anna. It is not for grief.
I hear you say that you are desolate,
Yet feel no pang! My heart is not my own,
To be so happy, knowing you are not.
But onward I am looking, and rejoice
To think my eyes shall be upon you ever;—
And ever watching you, if haply once
I chased but half a sorrow from your soul,
'Twould fill me with such gratitude to God,
That suffering with you still, though for you too,
I scarce should seem to suffer.

Comnenus. Born of Heaven

Love hath an empire o'er the spirits of pain
Beyond all earthly powers; else loth were I
To see thy lucid life obscured in mine.
But in the sun and summer of thy love,
My life shall live anew.

[ALEXIUS *advances, leaving* EUDOCIA, *who is joined by* ANNA.

Alexius. If go you must
We will not quarrel for the day and hour.
First to Illyrium, is it?

Comnenus. Thither first,
If Anna shall forbid me not; for there
Some present propping will your State demand
Ere it be stablished. Now the little left
Of this night give to sleep. Good night, good night.

Alexius. In the left wing the Protovestiary
Hath seen your couch prepared.

Comnenus. No need of that;
In the adjoining chamber I'll lay by
These heavier trappings, write a rescript there,
And take what rest I may. Again good night.

[*Exit.*

Anna (*in discourse with Eudocia*). . . . I cannot tell you how it startled me;
And surely it was strange—still whensoe'er
A health was drunk and guests grew clamorous,
That ominous figure glided into sight,
Looked slowly round and vanished.

Alexius. I gave leave
All should have entrance to the lower hall
To witness the festivities. This one
Had been some straggler.

Anna. But her mourning dress?

Alexius. She was a suitor for some forfeit head,
And thought to move compassion by her garb.

Anna. Her face was veiled, but truly hers was not
The bearing of a suitor. There was too
At times a something I had seen before—
—Oh, God! I see it now——

Enter THEODORA.

Eudocia. Hush! 'tis the Princess.

Theodora. Ye have feasted full,
And ye are merry. *I* must kneel to beg
A humble boon—the body of my sire.

Alexius. Your pardon, if my officers imposed
Such and so needless an indignity.
The fitting orders I will give myself.

Theodora. I know thee not, nor seek I aught of thee.
I am a suppliant to the Count Comnenus.
(*To Eudocia.*) *Thou* knowest there hath that between us been
Which makes it fitting I receive my suit
In audience from himself.

Eudocia. Doubtless, to-morrow . . .

Theodora. Much is the doubt what morrows bring to them
Who tire of their to-days. 'Tis now, now, now,
That I must see him, or else never more.

Eudocia. Through yonder door, then, if you pass . . .
She's gone.

[*Exit* THEODORA.

Alexius. Her purpose is apparent; she will tread
Fast in the footsteps of her father.

Eudocia. Yes;
And by her looks I doubt if even now
There be not poison working. I repent
That access has been granted her. Go in—
I fear she may design . . .

Anna. Hark, hark!—a groan——

[*All rush into the inner chamber, whilst* THEODORA, *passing out from it, crosses the stage, holding in her hand a dagger covered with blood.*

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